

GREAT LIVES

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A complete list of the GREAT LIVES with the authors' names
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DUCKWORTH, 3 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.2.

NAPOLEON III

by GRAHAM BROOKS

Great Lives

15783

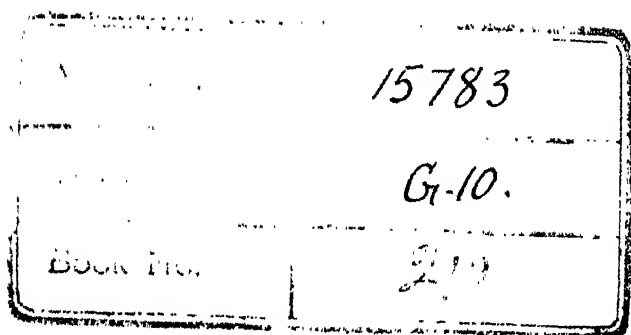
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CHRONOLOGY

- 1808....Birth of Louis Napoleon in Paris.
- 1811....Birth of the King of Rome (Napoleon II)
- 1814....Abdication of Napoleon.
- 1815....Final fall of Napoleon. Hortense and her children exiled.
- 1817-1830....Louis Napoleon divides his time between Augsburg, Arenenberg, and Thun.
- 1821....Death of Napoleon at St. Helena.
- 1831....Louis Napoleon joins the Italian insurrection.
- 1832....Death of the Duke of Reichstadt (King of Rome).
- 1836....The Strassburg plot.
- 1837....Death of Hortense.
- 1838....Louis Napoleon settles in London.
- 1840....The Boulogne conspiracy. Louis Napoleon sent to Ham.
- 1846....~~Escape~~ from Ham.
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- 1851....*Coup d'état*.
- 1852....Empire proclaimed.
- 1853....Marriage to Eugénie de Montijo.
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- 1855....The Paris Exhibition.

- 1856....*Annus mirabilis*. Birth of Prince Imperial
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- 1858....Orsini's attempt at assassination.
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- 1860....Annexation of Nice and Savoy. Com-
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Mexican adventure.
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tured at Sedan.
- 1873....Death of Napoleon III at Chislehurst.

CHAPTER I

EARLY VICISSITUDES

(1808-1830)

Birth in Paris - paternity questioned - exiled from France - formative years at Augsburg and Thun - Lord Malmesbury's portrait of Louis Napoleon at twenty-one - joins Italian insurrectionists - flees from Austrians in disguise - settles at Arenenberg, and opens campaign as Bonapartist claimant.

IN the year 1808 a child might well have seemed divinely favoured to be born a Bonaparte. Napoleon was then at the zenith of his glory; he reigned over a France stretching eastward to the Rhine and sprawling across the Alps over northern Italy and the Illyrian provinces; his satellites ruled Naples, the Netherlands, and non-Prussian Germany to the Vistula; his regiments were in Lisbon and in Spain; indeed, all Europe, save England and Scandinavia, had been subdued, and his pact with the powerful Tsar Alexander at Tilsit seemed to have guaranteed permanence to both dynasty and empire, while France herself had not yet reacted to the draining of her life-blood but still hailed the victories of his armies as stepping-stones to prosperity and peace. Napoleon, it seemed, had brought law and order, security and glory to a people he had found wallowing in chaos, fear, and want. To be born

a Bonaparte in 1808 was to be born the child of Fortune indeed.

So, on Wednesday the 20th of April in that year, salvos of artillery relayed the joyous tidings through the Empire. At one o'clock that morning, in a pretentious but gloomy Parisian mansion in the Rue Cerutti (now the Rue Lafitte), a third son had been born to Hortense, daughter of the Empress Josephine by her first husband, and wife of Louis, King of Holland, the Emperor's favourite brother. The child was thus both nephew and step-grandson of the great Napoleon.

Yet, despite the magic of his name, few could have divined aught but evil omen from the circumstances of this Bonaparte's entry into the drama of life. His mother still mourned the recent death of her first-born, from croup ; his parents were bitterly estranged and living apart, though not yet finally separated ; even his paternity was questioned by the gossips ; and, as if these were not deemed sufficient handicap, the baby arrived a month early and in ~~such~~ such a state of weakness that he had to be revived with wine-baths and wrapped in cotton wool. Such was the advent of Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte who, after enduring exile, penury, and captivity, was to evolve into President of the Republic, Emperor of the French, husband of the beautiful Eugénie de Montijo, the pitiful diseased wreck who

urrendered at Sedan, and the broken exile of Chislehurst – the man whom Victor Hugo stigmatised as *Napoléon le petit*, but who will nevertheless, despite his weaknesses, be acclaimed by posterity as one of the outstanding personalities of the nineteenth century.

No one of sound judgment would ascribe true greatness to Napoleon III. Yet some of its ingredients there must have been in the lonely despised adventurer who could sufficiently survive ridicule, disarm mistrust, and override opposition as to become and remain for a whole decade the very hub of European politics. Posterity will accord him a higher niche in the pantheon of history than did his contemporaries, from whom his final failure obscured his earlier achievements.

Of the falsity of the gossip regarding his paternity there can be no doubt. The name bandied most frequently was that of the Dutch Admiral Verhuell. But, at the crucial period, Hortense had been at Cauterêts with her husband – while the admiral had then been elsewhere – so scandal turned its tongue upon his brother, C. A. Verhuell, an obese and indolent mediocrity who, having been appointed Dutch Minister to Spain, had passed through Cauterêts on the way to his post and had paused to pay his respects to his sovereign. Some, even more malicious, whispered

the name of Napoleon himself as his step-daughter's lover. Whilst there is no evidence to support these allegations, there is substantial corroboration of the legitimacy of the child's birth. Not only does the upper part of the face and head strikingly resemble the King of Holland, but the gloomy brooding nature of the King's character was a prominent trait in the boy during his earlier years. Moreover, Louis himself – never at pains to conceal, but always to magnify, the lapses of his wife – acknowledged the child as his own both in his letters to Hortense and in his Will. Enemies of the future Emperor affirmed that Louis had stated that “not a drop of Bonaparte blood flowed in the child's veins,” but the sources of this information are tainted, and, even supposing these words had in fact been uttered by Louis, they were certainly belied by his conduct. There is no doubt that Louis himself knew the child to be his own offspring.

To understand the complex character of Napoleon III and its frequent inconsistencies, it is necessary to trace and examine his mother's parentage. The Vicomte Alexandre de Beauharnais, an aristocrat whose liberal views induced him to espouse the revolutionary cause, had been appointed commander-in-chief of the Army of the Rhine during the Terror. His noble birth, coupled with his failure to relieve Mainz, enabled

his enemies to foster suspicions which rushed him to the guillotine shortly before the collapse of Robespierre. Beauharnais was an idealist. From him Napoleon III inherited those liberal and humanitarian instincts which, though forming the better side of his nature, unfitted him for what he believed to be his destiny ; born with the name of Bonaparte, and daring to assume the rôle of a Bonaparte, he had in him too much of the Beauharnais to succeed. Napoleon III was supremely sensitive – to the end of his life he could not bear to witness suffering, and shrank from harsh measures ; the conflict between this Beauharnais trait and the innate ambition of the Bonaparte led him, at moments of crisis, to falter – and so to fail – when the ruthlessness of his uncle would have won the day. There was another source of weakness too – the sensuality inherited from Hortense and her mother Josephine, to which he gave indiscriminating indulgence throughout his career.

At the time of his birth it seemed that he might well be called upon to succeed Napoleon, who had designated his brothers Joseph and Louis and their issue as heirs in default of children of his own. Joseph had no issue ; Louis's first-born was already dead ; so there was but one life – and that a sickly one – between young Louis Napoleon and the succession. But the Emperor's marriage

to Marie Louise, followed by the birth of the King of Rome, relegated the boy to comparative obscurity. The State christening took place at Fontainebleau in November 1810, Napoleon and the Empress Marie Louise officiating as god-parents and the ceremony being performed by Cardinal Fesch, the Emperor's uncle. By this time, Louis had abdicated the throne of Holland, and had finally parted from Hortense, who remained in Paris with her children in close touch with the Court.

Few have experienced greater vicissitudes in childhood than this future Emperor. On the fall of Napoleon, he fled with his mother to Navarre, shortly afterwards returning to Malmaison under the protection of the Tsar. There they were visited by the King of Prussia and his sons, and the little Bonaparte played nursery games with the young Prince Wilhelm. Half a century later these two were to confront each other in the final act of the drama on the battlefield of Sedan. Then came news which sent the Bourbons flying and set the hearts of all the Bonapartes a-flutter. Napoleon was on the way from Elba. The Hundred Days had begun. Josephine was dead ; Marie Louise and her son, the King of Rome, would not return ; Hortense and her boys were accordingly thrust into prominence at Napoleon's side, taking part in the ceremony when the

imperial eagles were presented to the army on the Champ-de-Mars. It is said that, when the Emperor left for Waterloo, young Louis Napoleon clutched him round the knees and begged him not to go, declaring that the enemy would capture him. A fortnight later the fallen idol bade a last and hurried adieu at Malmaison. Henceforth his name, his memory, and the star and cordon of the Legion of Honour which he had conferred, were to be an ever-growing inspiration to the child he left behind. "Whenever I do wrong," wrote the thirteen-year-old Louis Napoleon six years later, on receiving news of the Emperor's death at St. Helena, "I think of the Great Man, and I seem to feel his spirit within me, urging me to keep myself worthy of the name of Napoleon."

On the 19th of July, 1815, Hortense was peremptorily ordered by the new royalist Government to leave Paris within twenty-four hours. A similar fate awaited her at Geneva. She fled to Aix, where her elder son was taken from her and handed over to his father who had obtained a judicial order to that effect. The Swiss Government granted the exiles permission to live on the shores of Lake Constance, where, in February 1817, Hortense purchased the Château of Arenenberg. Until Napoleon's death in 1821, however, French opposition to her residence so near the frontier caused her and young Louis Napoleon to

spend the intervening years at Augsburg, in Bavaria, visiting Arenenberg only occasionally.

The years 1817 to 1830, though the formative period of the young prince's life, were relatively uneventful. He attracted little attention, for not only was Bonapartism lifeless, but he was not even its representative, since his elder brother and the Duke of Reichstadt (the ex-King of Rome, Napoleon's only son) were still alive. These years fall into three distinct divisions. During the first, we see the young prince a timid, somewhat dull child, physically feeble and mentally stagnant under the ineffective tutorship of the Abbé Bertrand. Then, in 1820, he passed into the hands of Philippe Le Bas, who instituted a Spartan *régime* of discipline and study in which every hour of the day was occupied. Under Le Bas, Louis Napoleon attended classes at school in Augsburg and developed into a studious and somewhat gloomy youth. This Augsburg training left permanent imprints on his mental habits and in the German accent with which he spoke his native tongue ever afterwards. From school he went to the Swiss military camp at Thun, where he received instruction in artillery and engineering from two old Napoleonic colonels, Fournier and Dufour. Here, with intervals of travel with his mother, he remained until 1830.

Thun and travel had considerably altered the

disposition, if not the character, of the prince. Military training had roused him physically ; association with the two old Napoleonic officers and the glamour of the name of Bonaparte in such an atmosphere had germinated a belief in his own military genius ; companionship with the pleasure-loving Hortense after that of the austere Le Bas had caused a not unnatural reaction in both his outlook and his habits. In one of the frequent amours in which he indulged, he visited his inamorata, an Italian countess, disguised as a woman, and was promptly challenged to a duel when surprised by the outraged husband. Of his appearance and behaviour in 1829 we have a vivid description from the pen of Lord Malmesbury, who met him in Rome at that time. His legs were short, but his body was so long that on horseback he presented a commanding figure. Muscular and active, he excelled in swimming, horsemanship, and gymnastics. His expression was grave, but redeemed by a singularly bright smile, and he had become " a wild harum-scarum youth, riding at full gallop through the streets to the peril of the public ; fencing and pistol-shooting, apparently without a serious thought of any kind."

Serious thoughts were soon to occupy his mind, however. In February 1831 insurrection broke out in the Romagna on the death of Pope

Pius VIII. The Beauharnais in Louis Napoleon naturally inclined him towards liberalism, and this instinct had been strengthened by his associations at Augsburg, by the influence of Le Bas, and by the general spread of liberal doctrines throughout Europe. Consequently his sympathies were warmly in favour of the insurrectionists and the cause of freedom. He and his elder brother joined the Carbonari, and, at the invitation of Menotti, accepted commissions in the rebel forces.

They both saw active service, Louis Napoleon leading the assault upon Civit  Castellana. But the jealousy and suspicions of the other Italian leaders were aroused by the presence in the republican forces of colleagues bearing the name of Bonaparte ; the two princes accordingly resigned their commissions and offered to serve in the ranks, but this offer was refused and they became fugitives from the Austrians. At Forl  the elder prince died, leaving Louis Napoleon to slink from place to place, assisted on one occasion by the future Pope Pius IX. Finally he succumbed to measles at Ancona, where he was found by his mother who had hastened to the rescue. In hiding, with the Austrians in the town, Hortense nursed her son. On his recovery, they escaped in her carriage – Louis Napoleon, disguised in footman’s livery, on the box – and made their way to

Paris, where they were cordially received by Louis Philippe, who seemed disposed to allow them to remain in France. But his Ministers intervened and the exiles were ordered to depart forthwith.

Louis Napoleon spent some weeks in London before returning to Switzerland. There, at Arenenberg, he embarked upon his career as Bonapartist claimant. The aimless years were over. Before his eyes the star of his destiny beckoned him on.

CHAPTER II

YEARS OF FUTILE PLOTTING

(1831-1840)

Literary propaganda - meeting with Persigny - the Strassburg failure - exile - the Boulogne fiasco - sentenced to imprisonment for life.

OF his ultimate destiny as restorer of the Empire, Louis Napoleon seems never to have had the slightest doubt from early boyhood onwards. Yet the actual deciding influence which suddenly transformed the mere dreamer into the man of action is hard to trace ; possibly it was his brief incursion into Romagna politics ; possibly the journey through his native France, which he had not seen since his flight into exile as a child ; possibly the constant incitements of his mother. It is difficult also to fathom why this transformation should have occurred in 1831. It is true that his elder brother was now dead, but the Duke of Reichstadt (recognised by Bonapartists as the Emperor Napoleon II) was still alive. Nevertheless, whatever the cause, in that year he set himself to the definite task of resurrecting the Empire in his own person.

The first step was to make himself known to the

public. As an exile he could at present only hope to do this by his pen – with which he could not merely draw attention to himself but could also put forward the popular liberal theories of the day as being the essence of the imperial ideal. In May 1832, his first pamphlet, *Rêveries politiques*, was published, in which the prince declared himself a believer in republican principles but subtly propounded the thesis that, in practice, under existing conditions the liberties of the French people could only be safeguarded by an imperial Government. In the same month he was made an honorary citizen of the Helvetian Republic.

The death of the Duke of Reichstadt in the following July left Louis the rightful head of the Bonapartist cause and focused upon him the hopes and attentions of its adherents, with whom he slowly established contact in France. Gradually the French nation became vaguely aware of his existence. Recognising that nowhere would his name stand him in such good stead as with the army, he concentrated first upon propaganda of a military nature, and in 1833 published *Considérations politiques et militaires sur la Suisse*, which gained for him the honorary rank of captain in the Swiss Army. In the following year he brought out a five-hundred-page *Manual of Artillery*, copies of which he succeeded in getting into the

hands of French army officers, to whom his name was thus made familiar.

In 1835 occurred two important events. His engagement to his cousin Princess Mathilde – daughter of ex-King Jerome of Westphalia – with whom he had fallen deeply in love. And his fateful introduction to an ambitious adventurer named Fialin, self-styled Vicomte de Persigny.

During the succeeding months, Hortense and Persigny managed to persuade Louis Napoleon that the time had come for him to lay aside the pen and make a bid for Empire with the sword. In justice to the conspirators it must be conceded that conditions seemed to favour such a project. France was seething with discontent ; outbreaks had occurred in numerous districts. Moreover, in an effort to distinguish himself from the unpopular Bourbons in the eyes of the people, Louis Philippe had done his utmost to revive memories of the military glory of the Empire ; the tricolour was restored as the national flag, and it was announced that steps would be taken to retrieve the remains of Napoleon from St. Helena. Such conduct reminded the nation of the glories of the Empire whilst suffering the memories of its miseries to sleep. This policy of Louis Philippe, far from benefiting himself, only served to increase popular discontent with existing conditions and

to render the soil fertile for Bonapartist intrigue. Furthermore, the writings of the repatriated exiles of St. Helena had portrayed to a sentimental public the picture of an Emperor who had in reality been the champion of liberal ideas, and who, whilst stamping out the excesses of the Revolution, had still saved the people, for a time, from a return to the yoke of the old privileged aristocracy. Thiers himself, ardent monarchist and bitter opponent of the Bonapartes though he was, had unwittingly assisted these propagandists by his historical work upon the Consulate and the Empire. All these circumstances combined to create the Napoleonic Legend and to exude an atmosphere peculiarly favourable for an attempt to re-establish the Empire. Thus the advice of Hortense and Persigny did not appear so rash. Louis Napoleon himself, moreover, was no longer the wild harum-scarum youth Lord Malmesbury had seen in Rome in 1829. According to Chateaubriand, he had developed into "a studious young man, well informed, honourable, and naturally serious."

The plan upon which the conspirators decided was that the prince should present himself to the troops at a frontier fortress, gain their adherence, and, with them, march on Paris. It was confidently anticipated that this march would resemble the triumphal progress of his uncle's return from

Elba - that by the time the capital was reached the whole army would have joined the ranks, and the reins of government would be handed over without recourse to violence. In Baden lived a beautiful singer named Éléonore Brault, the widow of Sir Gordon Archer and professionally known as Madame Gordon, who had inherited an ardent imperialism from her father, a former officer in the Old Guard. An erstwhile mistress of Persigny, and now Louis Napoleon's, she also had a house in Strassburg, a garrison town where the troops were believed to be disaffected and where was stationed the great Napoleon's own regiment, the 4th Artillery. It was accordingly decided to make Strassburg the objective, and, through the medium of Madame Gordon, communication was established with Colonel Vaudrey of the artillery and with an engineer subaltern named Laity. Encouraged by reports from these officers, the prince solicited the aid of the governor of Strassburg, General Voirol, who, however, promptly handed the letter over to the authorities in Paris. It says little for the energies of Louis Philippe's Government that it took no steps whatsoever to prevent the attempt at its overthrow which was plainly hinted at in that letter.

In August 1836, Louis Napoleon rode into Strassburg after dark and interviewed a chosen

score or so of officers, with whom it was agreed that the blow should be struck at the end of October. Accordingly, on the 25th of that month, Colonel Vaudrey met Louis Napoleon at Freiburg. Three days later they rode into Strassburg to join Persigny. The 29th was passed in consultation with those officers who were to play leading parts in winning over the troops, and a final council of war was held that night.

Early next morning the prince dressed himself in artillery uniform, with a general's cocked hat, and the star and cordon of the Legion of Honour across his breast. It was dark, and snow was falling. Turning to his fellow conspirators, he drew himself up and said : " Gentlemen, the hour has struck. Now we shall see whether France remembers twenty years of glory ! " With these words he set off for the barracks of the 4th Artillery, where the troops had already been drawn up on parade by Colonel Vaudrey. His reception by the gunners augured well. Cries of "*Vive Napoléon ! Vive l'empereur !*" applauded his speech, and, with a band playing at their head, the soldiers marched off behind the prince to the quarters of the 46th Infantry Regiment.

Had the original plan been carried out, the whole plot might well have succeeded ; but this

would have involved the use of force against the doubtful troops, and the prince had insisted upon persuasion in preference to violence – the Beauharnais had overruled, and foiled, the Bonaparte in him. Even then, the attempt might still have gained its object had Louis Napoleon risen to the occasion with some fiery exhortation to the infantrymen. As it was, the reception accorded to him by this regiment was doubtful. Some cheered feebly ; others murmured ; the majority stood silent, unable to make head or tail of what was afoot, whilst some of the officers were feverishly endeavouring to rally their men against the conspirators. Fate hung in the balance. One stirring appeal, one martial gesture, one cry to recall the glories of Austerlitz and Jena, and the day might well have been won. But the prince seemed lifeless. In vain his lieutenants strove to arouse enthusiasm. At the critical moment an officer yelled out to the men that this was no Bonaparte but an impostor, the nephew of the ambitious Colonel Vaudrey. This swung round against Louis Napoleon even those who had been inclined to rally to his banner. There was a scuffle, some blows were exchanged between the factions, and the prince and his supporters were arrested. Drama had dwindled into farce. The whole adventure had lasted less than three hours.

The prince was not brought to trial but was shipped out of France to the United States. By this action the Government of Louis Philippe hoped to gain credit for clemency and to minimise the importance of the episode in the eyes of the public ; they were also most probably influenced by doubt whether a jury could be found to convict a Bonaparte at that moment – a doubt which was more than justified by the subsequent acquittal of Louis Napoleon's fellow conspirators, whose release was celebrated with riotous enthusiasm at a public banquet in Strassburg. Later it was asserted by the prince's enemies that he was pardoned only in exchange for his parole not to set foot again in France – but this accusation was never made by anyone in authority with responsible knowledge, and it seems unlikely that it was true ; the Government was concerned solely to get the great Napoleon's namesake out of the public eye as expeditiously as possible ; moreover, it will be seen hereafter that the Government's own prosecutor at a later trial stated that the prince's pardon had been unconditional.

Louis Napoleon was, however, punished for his failure in another manner. His engagement to Princess Mathilde was immediately cancelled by her father.

By the attempt, the prince had gained experience. Rather than quenching his ardour, it

fortified his determination. But it had apparently diminished his chances of future success, for the futile manner in which the plot had been executed, and the ease with which it had been suppressed, had made of him a laughing-stock amongst everyone except his more intimate personal adherents. He spent two months in America. Then came a letter from his mother announcing that she was about to undergo an operation. He hastened back to Arenenberg in time to remain at her side throughout her last illness and death, which took place in October. France thereupon demanded his expulsion from Swiss territory, which was firmly refused. But the prince was anxious not to embarrass this friendly State, and also believed that he might obtain more publicity for himself and his cause in England. So to London he went with Persigny, Vaudrey, and Doctor Conneau, taking up his quarters first in Lord Cardigan's house in Carlton Terrace and then in Lord Ripon's in Carlton Gardens.

Mixing freely in Society, he soon was on intimate terms with Disraeli and other prominent persons of the younger school, and became a frequenter of the functions at Lady Blessington's. Yet he was so reserved and sombre that he quickly gained the nickname of "Prince Taciturn." But faith in his destiny never forsook him. The Duke

of Wellington recorded his amazement on realising that this earnest young man was genuinely convinced that one day he would ascend the throne as Emperor of the French.

In 1839 he published *Des Idées Napoléoniennes*, one of his most skilful and effective pieces of propaganda. Purporting to be an explanatory account of his uncle's foreign and administrative policy, it was in reality a pronouncement of his own – or rather of a programme which he anticipated would gain adherents to his cause. Herein he depicted Napoleonic theories as reconciling order with liberty, and the rights of the people with the principles of authority. He presented a copy of this work to Lord Lytton (then Edward Bulwer), who described it as “the book of a very able mind.” Lytton had appraised the prince's character to a nicety – in describing it, he concluded : “Above all, he has that intense faith in his own destiny with which men rarely fail of achieving something great.” That faith in his destiny was about to be put to a second test – with results that would have shattered the faith of any but a Louis Napoleon.

During his sojourn in England, the prince and his partisans had organised a propaganda campaign of considerable magnitude, particularly within the ranks of the French Army, and by the summer of 1840 it seemed to them that conditions

were ripe for another *coup*. This time it was decided to land near Boulogne, win over or subdue the garrison, and march on Paris. It was the Strassburg plan all over again, and, as on that occasion, the prince put himself into communication with certain officers from whom he gained the impression that he could count upon the assistance of Marshal Clausel and also of General Magnan, commander of the *Département du Nord*. He had also received some encouragement from the Tsar. Joseph Orsi, a Florentine and the banker of the Bonaparte family, was then in London, and to him was entrusted the task of making the necessary arrangements for the expedition. A small steamer, the *Edinburgh Castle*, was chartered, and laden with stores and equipment.

On the 6th of August, 1840, the prince embarked with General Montholon (who had shared his uncle's exile at St. Helena), several officers, and over fifty men. They took with them numerous proclamations to be displayed, promising the people liberty, security, and the reduction of taxes. One flamboyant address to the army read: "Soldiers, the great spirit of Napoleon speaks to you through me. Traitors, begone, for the Napoleonic spirit, which cares only for the welfare of the nation, advances to overwhelm you!"

Landing in the dark at Wimereux, the little band of invaders captured the coastguards and marched into Boulogne. In the barracks of the 42nd Infantry Regiment a subaltern, who was a confederate of the Bonapartists, had mustered the men in readiness and told them that Louis Philippe had ceased to reign. When the prince appeared, the troops listened quietly to his speech, and some were just breaking into faint cries of "*Vive Napoléon !*" when a senior officer arrived on the scene. A scuffle ensued, a shot was fired, a grenadier was wounded, and the troops were then rallied to their officers. The conspirators beat a hasty retreat from the barracks, and endeavoured, without success, to break into the castle. The alarm was sounded, the national guard turned out, and the prince and his companions scurried out of the town, halting outside at the foot of the column erected to the memory of the Grand Army. The troops then advanced upon them. Louis Napoleon and his followers fled to the sea-shore, where some remained irresolute, the others (including the prince) swimming out to a yawl, in which they endeavoured to reach the *Edinburgh Castle*. The national guard opened fire and the yawl capsized. One of the prince's men was shot, another was drowned, several others were wounded, and he himself was struck by a spent bullet. There was no alternative but

surrender. The conspirators were thrown into gaol pending trial.

Louis Napoleon was arraigned before the Chamber of Peers, and was condemned to imprisonment for life in the castle of Ham. On the very same day on which the remains of his uncle Napoleon were laid to rest with pomp and ceremony in the Invalides, he entered the gates of the fortress as a prisoner.

The ridicule which this failure, even more ignominious than that of Strassburg, brought upon him and his cause was more than counteracted by the increased prestige which he earned by his demeanour at the trial. For once, Louis Napoleon rose to the occasion. "For the very first time," he said, when called upon to speak in his own defence, "I am allowed to raise my voice in France and speak freely to Frenchmen." Posing as the champion of the sovereignty of the people, he declared that the plebiscite which had conferred power upon Napoleon and his heirs had never been revoked by an appeal to the nation, and that consequently the restoration of the Bourbons, and everything else done since, was illegal. Undoubtedly the prince made a most favourable impression. His cause was also assisted by a passing phrase, used by the prosecutor, to the effect that after Strassburg he had been "pardoned unconditionally," thus

disposing of the old *canard* that he had broken his parole.

For nearly six years he was to remain in captivity at Ham. His next bid for power was to meet with almost incredible success.

CHAPTER III

THE PRISONER OF HAM

(1840-1848)

State prisoner at Ham - foundations of permanent ill health - literary work and propaganda - escape - London again - fall of Louis Philippe - elected Member of the Assembly - takes his seat - elected President of the Republic by overwhelming popular vote.

IN after years, Louis Napoleon was wont to refer smilingly to the "University of Ham," saying that it was there that he had graduated with honours. There was much truth in this jesting statement, for the years spent there in study and research transformed him into one of the best-informed men of his time; the enforced and narrow confinement taught him fortitude and patience, and the propaganda which he issued thence, and the skilful use he made of his position, won for his cause numerous adherents and enhanced his reputation. At Ham, his never-waning faith in his destiny stood him in good stead. His whole career is, indeed, a remarkable example of the power of faith. Only when faith at last deserted him did his fortunes begin to decline.

The château of Ham, since destroyed by the Germans during the Great War, was an obsolete fortress, some seventy miles from Paris in the

Department of the Somme, with a garrison of four hundred men. It stood on low ground and was surrounded by marshes, over which the mists frequently hung – altogether an insalubrious spot. It is, therefore, not surprising that in such surroundings and with insufficient bodily exercise the prince's health finally broke down. He entered the fortress fit and virile; when he escaped, five years later, he was weak, emaciated, and wan, with the stoop of a man twice his age. There can be no doubt that his captivity shortened his life and contributed to the origin of the ill health which was to undermine both will and constitution and, ultimately, to bring about his downfall.

Not that he was ill-treated by his gaolers. Accompanied in his confinement by General Montholon and Dr. Conneau, he was well fed and allowed complete freedom within the limits of his own quarters. Outdoors he was permitted exercise on horseback in the courtyard of the fortress and at his request was given a small piece of garden to cultivate. Indoors his sitting-room was crowded with bookshelves, upon which he amassed an extensive library, and a spare room was fitted up as a laboratory where he received instruction from a friendly chemist and conducted experiments on his own. Visitors were granted access to him without restriction – so much so,

that he indulged quite openly in a liaison with a cobbler's daughter, Éléonore (or sometimes described as Alexandrine) Vergeot, who bore him two sons during the period of his captivity and was by no means the only recipient of his attentions at this time. He was able to correspond with the outside world ; and, since his valet Thélín could pass in and out of the fortress as he pleased, this correspondence was not even subject to censorship. Nevertheless, for one who had been active and who was obsessed with political ambition, this enforced stagnation was a severe strain. Fortunately the prince possessed the faculty of absorbing himself in work.

As before, in Arenenberg and London, he determined to keep his name and cause before the public by his pen, and the research which he now buried himself in enabled him to write with knowledge upon subjects hitherto beyond his power. Pamphlets and essays followed each other in rapid profusion. In *Fragments historiques* he discussed the English Revolution of 1688 and compared it with existing conditions in France, likening the House of Orléans to the Stewarts, and (by innuendo) putting himself forward as the potential counterpart of William of Orange. Except for the purpose of political propaganda, a ludicrous analogy ! Further historical dissertations followed, and throughout his

imprisonment he was busily engaged in compiling a history of artillery with which he hoped to gain military support for himself. There were four pamphlets which secured for him particular support in diverse quarters. The first of these were an essay on the sugar question, then agitating France – in which he advocated a policy of protection for the beet industry – and an essay on army recruitment in which he strongly commended the Prussian system. The third was a proposal to link up the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans by the cutting of a canal through Nicaragua ; this forerunner of the Panama Canal scheme advertised Louis Napoleon as a man of enterprise and vision. The fourth of these pamphlets – on the extinction of pauperism – rendered him the greatest service. In this he advocated the solution of the unemployment problem by State appropriation of unoccupied land and its colonisation for agricultural purposes on a semi-socialistic basis. This won him great support among the masses. So much, indeed, had he succeeded, by propaganda, in representing himself as the friend of the people that the great republican publicist and leader, Louis Blanc, came to visit him at Ham.

Louis Napoleon was now experiencing little difficulty in obtaining publicity for his literary effusions. Throughout the early part of his

captivity he had succeeded in establishing relations, by correspondence, with the editors of various provincial newspapers in northern and eastern France, with the result that several of these had opened their columns to his writings. The spread of this propaganda and the intimacy which he was establishing with the republican leaders – coupled with the needs of his health for a change of environment – convinced him that the time had come for escape.

His father, the ex-King Louis, who was seriously ill, had written to Louis Philippe asking that his son might be allowed to visit him before he died. This had been refused, whereupon Louis Napoleon himself sent to the French King a pledge that, if he were permitted to see his dying father, he would give his parole to return to Ham after the old man's death. Louis Philippe's refusal of this plea reacted greatly in favour of the prince's popularity.

He now determined to break out of prison. Apart from the difficulties of avoiding detection of the necessary preparations, and of evading the vigilance of the garrison, of whom never less than sixty were on duty, there was a further serious obstacle in the lack of funds. To his credit it must be said that the prince had impoverished himself by indemnifying and pensioning those who had suffered by reason of their adherence to his

cause at Strassburg and Boulogne. Practically the whole of his mother's fortune, which he had inherited, had been melted in this way. Through the medium of English friends, however, the financial problem was solved. There was living in London at that time the crazy exiled Duke of Brunswick. The Duke was persuaded to provide Louis Napoleon with funds for his escape and for the re-establishment of the Empire in return for a promise of future assistance to regain his own lost dukedom. The sum of six thousand pounds was accordingly handed over.

The plan of escape evolved by the prisoners was simple. The prince's rooms had been in a bad state of repair throughout the period of his imprisonment. He had, in fact, previously requested that the defects might be remedied, only to be told that the work would be carried out if he cared to pay for it, to which he not unnaturally retorted that he could hardly be expected to finance the restoration of a State prison. Now, however, he deliberately caused such further damage as to render repair inevitable, then demanded an inspection. Work was put in hand, and for twenty-four days labourers came and went, passing in and out of the gates between the sentries. On the twenty-fourth day Louis Napoleon shaved off his moustache and whiskers, donned a wig and the dress of a labourer, and

calmly walked across the courtyard and out of the gates with a plank over his shoulder. This was on the morning of the 25th of May, 1846.

The most difficult part of all had now to be played by Dr. Conneau in delaying discovery of the prince's escape. A dummy was placed in the prince's bed, over which the doctor mounted guard, defeating every attempt of the governor or his officers to disturb his "patient," who was alleged to be very ill. At last, however, the governor's powers of endurance were exhausted – or his suspicions aroused. The bed-clothes were dragged back, and the dummy thus revealed. Uproar broke out in the fortress. But by this time Louis Napoleon was far away. Near the castle a carriage had been waiting ready to convey him to Cambrai, where a fresh vehicle was hired. At Valenciennes he boarded the train, and that night was in London. The first intimation his English friends had of his escape was when, unasked and unannounced, he suddenly appeared in their midst at one of Lady Blessington's celebrated evening functions.

He took up his residence at 10 King Street, St. James's, the devoted Conneau rejoining him there after serving the sentence of three months' imprisonment imposed upon him for his share in the escape. As a reward the prince purchased a practice in London for his friend.

Despite his return to freedom, Louis Napoleon was unable to be present at the death of his father which occurred in July, for the Austrian authorities firmly refused him admittance into their country.

For a time it seemed that the prince had pigeon-holed all thoughts of his destiny. So far as appearances went, he had ceased to engage in pamphleteering or other forms of propaganda. He became a prominent figure in the fashionable world of the Clubs, the Theatre, and the Turf, and flung himself with zest into a whirl of gaieties and pleasure – a not unnatural reaction after the solitude of Ham. Some insight into his previous existence may be derived from the fact that here in London, at the age of thirty-eight, he, a Frenchman, saw for the first time a French tragedy performed. The famous Madame Rachel played the leading part. Years afterwards, during the Empire, she was to become his mistress for a while. Louis Napoleon soon emerged as the darling of the London ballet girls, who competed vigorously for his favour, and it was during this period that he met Miss Howard. Of this beautiful woman's origin there are conflicting stories, but it is clear that she was of humble birth, became the mistress of a steeplechase jockey, whose name she took, and had enslaved numerous wealthy lovers before linking her fortunes with

those of Louis Napoleon, to whom she was introduced by Count D'Orsay. Later, she was to sell the collection of valuable jewels she had amassed from her previous admirers in order to provide funds for the prince's rise to power. Under the Empire she was to be repaid with colossal interest and ennobled as Comtesse de Beauregard, the Emperor still seeking her favours in the house which had been found for her near the palace.

Louis Napoleon now revived his project of a Nicaraguan canal and vainly endeavoured to raise the necessary capital to form a syndicate for its exploitation. Under cover of his own apparent inactivity in politics, his adherents and emissaries in France were labouring feverishly with propaganda for the cause. So, when the news of Louis Philippe's abdication reached London in February 1848, the prince slipped away to Paris without even waiting to pack his trunks. On the 28th of February, the morrow of his arrival in the French capital, he addressed a letter to the Provisional Government, declaring that he had hastened from exile to place himself under the flag of the newly proclaimed republic. To his chagrin, the sole reply was a peremptory request to leave France forthwith.

He hastened back to London to await events, maintaining close touch with his supporters in his native land, by some of whom he was urged

to put forward his name as a candidate in the forthcoming elections for the Assembly. Anxious to avoid any false step at this critical juncture, he sent Persigny across the Channel to investigate and report ; as the result, he decided that during the existing upheaval it would be wiser to remain in the background until the drift of popular tendencies had become more sharply defined.

On the 2nd of June, the law of banishment against the Bonapartes was repealed – not out of any consideration for Louis Napoleon, but to regularise the position of three of his cousins who had been elected members of the Assembly. Two days later were held the supplementary elections. This time the prince allowed his name to go forward as a candidate and was elected by four departments. Immediately, the furtive labours of his agents bore fruit and Bonapartism leaped openly into flame. Four Bonapartist newspapers appeared, favours bearing the prince's portrait were sold everywhere, cries of “ *Vive Napoléon !* ” and even “ *Vive l'empereur !* ” were heard in the army and on the boulevards.

This outbreak seriously alarmed the Government, which issued a warrant for the arrest of Louis Napoleon and his principal accomplices. A debate in the Assembly next day resulted in a vote that the prince be allowed to take his seat – which in effect negatived the issue of the warrant

— but the hostile feeling manifested against him was strong. Louis Napoleon was quick to take advantage of this situation. He wrote to the President of the Assembly, resigning his seat on the ground that he did not wish to be the cause of any disturbance. By this action he appeared to repudiate any personal ambition and to desire only the welfare of the people ; in reality he was deferring his entry into the arena until a more propitious moment, and at the same time increasing his popularity by seeming to be the victim of jealousy and misrepresentation. It was an astute move.

In the September elections he renewed his candidature. This time he was returned for five departments and announced his intention of taking his seat as Member for the Seine. On the 24th of September, 1848, he arrived in Paris, and two days later took his seat in the Assembly. Clad in a black coat, which served to accentuate the pallor of his face, he rose and faced his fellow deputies. “ After thirty-three years of proscription and exile,” he said, “ I find myself at last among you, I once more regain my native land and my rights as one of its citizens. It is to the republic that I owe this happiness ; let the republic therefore receive my oath of gratitude and allegiance ; and let my generous fellow citizens, to whom I am indebted for my seat in its legislature,

be assured that I will endeavour to justify their suffrages by labouring with you for the maintenance of tranquillity, the first necessity of the country, and for the development of the democratic institutions which the country is entitled to reclaim. My conduct, always guided by a sense of duty and respect for the laws, will prove, in defiance of the passions by which I have been maligned and still am blackened, that none is more anxious than I am to devote myself to the defence of order and the consolidation of the republic." At the time, both the language of this address and the manner of its delivery created a favourable impression on his audience.

Thereafter the prince's appearances in the Chamber were infrequent, his utterances still more rare. There was indeed good reason for this. His new supporters and admirers were to be found in mutually hostile camps ; socialists, even communists, believed in him as the friend of the people, on account of some of his writings such as the essay on the extinction of pauperism ; some of the constitutionalists regarded him as the champion of law and order, because of his action in London in enrolling as a special constable during the Chartist riots ; imperialists revered his name ; many of the monarchists supported him as a weakling who, if once in power, could be used to further their own objects. A speech which would

please one of these factions might inevitably alienate another. So Louis Napoleon wisely preserved silence.

But if he himself remained inactive, his supporters redoubled their efforts in fanning the flames of Bonapartism. Not only the Government, but the vast majority of the Assembly was alarmed at the popular demonstrations in his favour. Determined to clip the eagle's wings, one Member moved a resolution aimed at debarring Louis Napoleon from office, and to this the prince had no option but to reply. Halting, irresolute, confused, he cut such a poor figure that his opponents were convinced that so weak and ineffective an adversary could afford no danger to the republic and contemptuously withdrew their motion. Louis Napoleon retired covered with ridicule. It is difficult to decide whether his poor showing was by design or not. His political astuteness was sufficiently acute to have enabled him to foresee the beneficial result of such a pose ; on the other hand, he had previously shown at Strassburg that he was not the man to rise to the occasion when faced with an unforeseen situation. Suffice it to say that nothing contributed so greatly to his ultimate success as his apparent failure in the Chamber that day. That he could retort boldly on occasion was made apparent shortly afterwards when, during the discussion on the

method of electing the President, a Member delivered a personal attack accusing the prince of designs upon the imperial title. With dignity and force Louis Napoleon parried this thrust by announcing his candidature for the Presidency of the Republic.

During the ensuing days it became increasingly apparent that the only serious candidatures were those of Louis Napoleon and General Cavaignac. There was little doubt that the prince would head the poll, but to secure election he must obtain a majority over all the votes of the other candidates put together, otherwise the choice of President would be referred to the Assembly, with whom Cavaignac was as popular as the prince was disliked. The elections were held on the 10th and 11th of December. For diverse reasons all the anti-republican forces, some of the socialists, and the bulk of the communists rallied to Louis Napoleon. The result was announced on the 20th. The figures astounded even the prince's most fervent admirers. No less than 5,434,226 votes had been cast for the citizen Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. Cavaignac received only 1,448,107 ; Ledru-Rollin 370,119 ; Raspail 36,920 ; whilst the poet Lamartine, once the idol of the people, polled a pitiful 17,910. The late results, which trickled in afterwards from outlying areas, increased the prince's majority still further.

That evening, by candlelight, clad in black with the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour upon his breast, Louis Napoleon made his entrance into the Chamber to take the oath of fealty to the republic and the constitution. Persigny, with more political sagacity on this occasion than his chief, had advised him to refuse to take the oath, but to declare that he would refer the constitution to the popular vote before doing so. The prince, however, ignored this counsel, doubtless fearing the consequences of the delay in obtaining power which would ensue in that event. So, unhesitatingly, he raised his hand and swore : " In the presence of God, and before the French people, represented by the national assembly, I swear to remain faithful to the democratic republic, one and indivisible, and to fulfil all the duties imposed upon me by the constitution." Less than three years later he was to dishonour his oath. When he took that oath, he knew that the goal for which he had never ceased to strive could not be attained without breaking his sworn pledge – and that goal he meant to attain. Yet he swore. It is the least excusable of all his public acts, and one that was to gain him countless enemies. Had he adopted Persigny's advice, that stigma at least would never have sullied his name.

Later that evening the newly-installed President gave a private dinner-party to his faithful henchmen

of Strassburg and Boulogne. Well might they celebrate ! Their feet were now firmly planted on the ladder. It was to prove but a short climb to the top. That night Louis Napoleon slept at the Élysée. The palace which the republic had allotted to its President had not been got ready for his occupation. He had but a bed, a table, a washstand, and a chair for furniture. Such surroundings must have reminded the new head of the State of his prison days at Ham.

CHAPTER IV

PRINCE-PRESIDENT

(1848-1851)

Playing for popularity – the Italian expedition – quarrels with the Assembly – triumphal progress through the provinces – outmanœuvres his opponents – preparations for a *coup d'état*.

WHATEVER faults the prince possessed, ingratitude was not among them. He signalised his advent to power by lavishing honours and rewards upon all who had aided him or shown him kindness in adversity. Even the officer who had escorted him as a prisoner from Strassburg received the Legion of Honour. Indeed, it soon became apparent that Louis Napoleon intended to exercise the patronage of an autocrat and assume the trappings of royalty, rather than content himself with the modest establishment of a democratic president. Reception, balls, and banquets followed each other in glittering sequence at the Élysée. His outings in the streets and parks caused many a mild sensation. "Monsieur Bonaparte," wrote an old Parisian, "has brought from England the finest horses and the loveliest woman in the world." The woman was Miss Howard. For a while, however, it seemed that all would be plain sailing for the new President. His Cabinet was

composed of moderate men under Odilon Barrot. The only serious attempt at opposition, a demonstration of armed workmen in Paris, organised by Ledru-Rollin on the 13th of June, 1849, was promptly extinguished by the troops under Changarnier. The Assembly, anxious to humour one whom it confidently anticipated making a mere tool, proved singularly accommodating on the question of finance, augmenting his salary of £24,000, at his request, by additional grants for "expenses," until his total annual receipts as President reached the startling figure of £65,000. These funds enabled him to purchase added popularity by scattering all manner of largesse among the troops and work-people. Whilst it is impossible to exonerate him from ulterior motives in such actions, it must be conceded that Louis Napoleon was naturally generous to a fault. On this occasion, however, he was being generous with other people's money.

Despite the apparent calm, a storm was rendered inevitable by the very inconsistencies of the President's position and the anomalies of his election. Orléanists, Legitimists, and Bonapartists had supported him in the belief that he would prove a tool in their hands — Thiers, indeed, had openly referred to him as "a noodle whom anyone could twist around his finger." The two sections of monarchists had each visualised

him in the part of a second Monk, paving the way for the return of their own claimant to the throne. The Bonapartists had counted upon his emulating the example of his uncle and restoring the Empire for their benefit and under their direction. Some of the leaders of the extreme Left had relied upon their ability to exploit his liberal tendencies. It was a delicate situation ; the more so, as the prince was determined to be captain of the ship and the servant of no faction. As it was, he tried to make the best of all worlds and be all things to all men. Whilst claiming, with some justice, to be the champion of law and order, he mixed freely with the common people, letting it be known that he was ever accessible to the meanest supplicant.

With the passage of time the incongruity of his position became ever more manifest and impossible. As the champion of law and order, he was mainly dependent upon the support of the priesthood, the monarchists, and the army leaders, by whom he was persuaded to despatch an expedition under General Oudinot to restore the Pope to sovereignty in the Romagna. This was not only against his personal inclinations – for had he not fought in the ranks of the Carbonari himself? – but was also calculated to alienate all those Frenchmen who had hitherto regarded him as the friend of liberty. Happily for the President, however,

Oudinot's force suffered a reverse at the hands of the republicans outside Rome. This caused a reaction in France. National pride absorbed all other sentiments, and the nation rallied behind its President in anxiety to retrieve the national honour by victory. Thus his popularity with the army was enhanced, whilst his reputation with the parties of the Left was retrieved by the publication of a letter in which he demanded liberal reforms in Rome, declaring that "the Republic did not send an army to stamp out Italian liberty in that city."

His struggle with the politicians was now to begin. Republican leaders like Cavaignac, and monarchists such as Thiers, were becoming openly aggressive. One by one, the leaders who had helped him into the Élysée in the belief that he would prove their minion broke away into bitter opposition on discovering that he was a man of ability and determination with views and a will of his own. The Assembly, in the main conservative, was alarmed at the tide of socialist success in the by-elections, and indignant at the democratic and liberal leanings of the President. No longer was the Chamber complacent. When Louis Napoleon proposed an amnesty for all those convicted of participating in the disorders of June 1848, it twice refused. Odilon Barrot was dismissed, and during the next two years the

prince tried over eighty different Cabinet Ministers, but, shuffle and change as he might, he could not check the ever-growing opposition of the Deputies. Whilst it is apparent that Louis Napoleon never intended to govern according to the constitution – that he, from the outset, determined to make the Assembly his servant and not to accept or even tolerate its advice – it must be admitted that he genuinely believed that the Assembly, in opposing him, was opposing the interests of the nation. That he loved France, and had the welfare of her people sincerely at heart, not even his enemies have denied. The Assembly, alarmed at the prince's popularity, altered the suffrage laws so as to reduce the electorate from nine millions to six. At the time, Louis Napoleon was not opposed to this – indeed, might be said to have favoured it ; later, however, he was to turn the Assembly's action against it with fateful results.

In the autumn of 1850, Louis Napoleon made a tour of the country. Except in the few remaining republican strongholds, big industrial cities like Lyons, the tour resembled a triumphal progress. There could be no doubt that his personal popularity was immense, and he lost no opportunity to turn this to account. "The Assembly," he declared in one of his speeches during the tour, "supports me whenever I propose

repressive measures, but never when I seek to do any good." Public opinion accepted this view. More and more the President became identified in the public mind with the cause of the people. Shouts of "*Vive Napoléon !*" greeted him everywhere – occasionally he heard a cry of "*Vive l'empereur !*"

The first real trial of strength came with the President's dismissal of General Changarnier from the Ministry of War. Then followed the Assembly's refusal to accede to Louis Napoleon's request for a further grant of two million francs – hardly a surprising or unreasonable refusal, for the demand amounted in effect to the fixing of his annual income from the State at three and a half million francs ! Nevertheless, the refusal gained him widespread sympathy, and there was much talk of providing him with the required amount by public subscription. The prince, however, solved the problem by selling all his horses by auction (which further increased general sympathy), and by borrowing half a million francs from the Spanish Ambassador. War between the President and the Assembly was thus openly declared. The question uppermost in the prince's mind was how to obtain a prolongation of his term of office, for the constitution, to which he had sworn allegiance, forbade the re-election of the President after his period of four years had

expired. He did not wish to break his oath – if it could be avoided. Therefore, to gain his end, he must secure a revision of the constitution. Persigny and his other intimates set to work with a will, and a petition bearing over thirteen hundred signatures and praying for the revision of the constitution was presented to the Assembly. A stormy debate ensued, but the necessary majority was not forthcoming.

Louis Napoleon now saw that if he were to get his way it could only be by drastic measures. The Assembly had prevented him from obtaining authority from the people ; he must act first and trust to the people's ratifying his conduct afterwards. To succeed, he must have a strong and dependable man in control of the army, and must find some pretext which would justify his action in the eyes of the nation. The first requirement was satisfied by the appointment to the Ministry of War of General Saint Arnaud, who had been recalled from Algeria and had given assurances of his readiness to stake his own future in the gamble with the others. The second was brought about by Louis Napoleon with considerable ingenuity. He proposed to the Assembly the restoration of universal suffrage. The Assembly, sufficiently alert to appreciate the effect of an extension of the electorate upon the fortunes of the popular President, was not, however, astute enough to

foresee the consequences of refusal. With amazing short-sightedness it declined to confer the right to vote upon the disfranchised three millions, and, in so doing, appeared to be opposing the rights of the common people, whilst allowing Louis Napoleon to stand out in sharp relief as the declared champion of those very rights. The President had outmanœuvred his enemies, and now determined to take full advantage of the situation.

He was confident of the support of the masses, for his prestige and popularity had soared to a remarkable height. Nor was this entirely without justification. He had genuinely striven to improve the state of industry and commerce, and to better the condition of his compatriots. In his Message to the Assembly in 1850, he had outlined schemes for the extension or construction of railways, roads, harbours, and canals ; for the introduction of agricultural machinery, the establishment of model farms, and the improvement of methods of cultivation and cattle-breeding ; and had directed the preparation of plans for the sanitation, drainage, and street-widening of the capital. He had, in fact, succeeded in creating the impression (by no means false, as events were to prove) that, if unhampered by a reactionary parliament, he could and would lead the nation on to prosperity.

The key positions were now in the hands of confederates upon whose loyalty and energy he could rely. With Saint Arnaud at the War Office and General Magnan in command of the Army of Paris, he had control of the armed forces. His *confidant* de Maupas was Chief of Police. Into the inner councils of the conspiracy, which already included the inevitable Persigny and de Morny, were now brought Colonel Fleury and a Dr. Véron, proprietor of an influential newspaper and director of the Opéra. But progress was slow, for the prince, having made up his mind to strike, once again displayed characteristic vacillation in bringing himself to act. Twice the date was fixed, only to be postponed. Finally, influenced by the curious superstitious streak in his make-up, he chose the 2nd of December, that day being the anniversary of Austerlitz and of his uncle's coronation as Emperor.

For some weeks it had been common gossip that a *coup d'état* was in preparation. In fact, the prince himself had made little attempt to disguise his intention, maintaining secrecy only as to the hour and mode of its execution. Meanwhile, his opponents had been busily engaged in planning a similar stroke in their own interests, and their arrangements had so far advanced that on the 1st of December, the very eve of the *coup*, they were jubilantly anticipating the hour of their own

victory. "Before a month is up," Thiers had declared, "we will have Louis Bonaparte locked up in Vincennes." So confident, indeed, were they, that the Orléans family was hastily preparing its return from exile, and the Prince de Joinville had actually crossed the Channel and was waiting in readiness at the Belgian frontier. Yet, on that day, there was no sign of any immediate action by Louis Napoleon. To all appearances everything went on just as usual. The customary Monday-evening reception took place at the Élysée, the President moving in and out among the guests and chatting freely as though nothing were in the wind. There were no meetings or whisperings among the conspirators to arouse suspicion. Morny, it was noted, was not even at the Élysée, but was observed at the Opéra enjoying himself in his own dissolute way.

Ten o'clock was the hour at which the President customarily withdrew from these receptions. At ten o'clock precisely, just as usual, he retired to his private room. The door closed behind him. The die was cast. A few hours later, Louis Napoleon was to emerge master of France.

CHAPTER V

THE "COUP D'ÉTAT" AND DICTATORSHIP (1851-1852)

A night of activity – nominated President for ten years – four months' dictatorship and its results – increased popularity – the Bordeaux speech – national plebiscite restores the Empire – proclaimed Napoleon III.

ONCE in the privacy of his room, Louis Napoleon greeted his faithful secretary, Pietri, with a laugh. The general conversation at the reception had amused him greatly, for it had been of a *coup d'état* which his enemies were said to be plotting ; he, it seemed, would wake up one morning to find himself behind prison bars at Vincennes ! The prince, for the moment, was in light-hearted mood, for he felt that the hour of his own destiny had struck. But his mood changed with the arrival of Morny, de Maupas, and General Saint Arnaud. The fate of all in that room hung in the balance. With due solemnity, Louis Napoleon unlocked a drawer in his desk, drew out three packages labelled "Rubicon," and handed one to each of his three Ministers. They were the final instructions for the night's work.

Morny went off to the Jockey Club, to disarm suspicion by gambling until morning when his

own part in the drama would commence. De Maupas hurried away to print and plaster Paris with the proclamations which had been drafted by the President, and to send his police out into the night on various missions. Saint Arnaud rejoined General Magnan, who awaited orders for the troops. Louis Napoleon remained behind with the hardest task of all – to wait in suspense for news of the success or failure of the plot.

All night long he waited, with horses saddled in the palace stables below. Had things gone wrong, his only hope of liberty would have lain in flight. Meanwhile, his lieutenants were playing their parts with coolness and precision. At midnight, General Magnan moved his troops silently through the streets and occupied all the strategical points in the capital, including the chamber where the Assembly met. De Maupas, with Colonel de Bévillé, drove to the State printing works with a large body of police. Compositors, who had been warned for night duty, were given the proclamations to print, sentries being posted over them and at every door and window of the works in order to ensure that no news of what was afoot should leak out. To de Maupas had fallen the most vital duties. One mistake, one delay, and the whole plot might have collapsed like a pack of cards. He acquitted himself well. His chief object was to effect the arrest of every political

leader who might cause trouble – and to effect the arrests so swiftly and so silently that no warning could reach any of them. De Maupas selected separate police officers for each arrest ; to each one he gave orders independently and in secret ; not a single officer knew that arrests other than that which he was to make were being carried out. Seventy-eight persons – Thiers, Cavaignac, Changarnier, and fifteen other members of the Assembly, together with sixty chiefs of secret societies and leaders of the mob – had been designated for arrest, and for the past fortnight all of these had been kept under continuous observation so that their whereabouts at the required moment might be known. By dawn they had all been awakened from their sleep and placed safely under lock and key in the Mazas prison. Whilst the arrests were in progress squads of police had been placarding Paris with the proclamations, in which the President accused the Assembly of responsibility for the state of anarchy and civil strife, declared the Assembly dissolved, universal suffrage restored, and the capital under martial law, appealed to the people as the sovereign power to endorse his action, and submitted to their votes the outlines of a constitution which provided for a responsible head nominated for ten years, a Council of State, and a Legislative Chamber.

At six o'clock on the morning of the anniversary of Austerlitz, the first report reached the anxious Louis Napoleon. Not a hitch had occurred. Paris was quiet. The troops and police were in control everywhere. Groups of citizens were reading and discussing the proclamations, and the city was agog with the news, but no sign of opposition as yet met eye or ear. The prince handed over fifty thousand francs – the last of his private fortune – for distribution amongst the rank and file. Then, at ten o'clock, with his uncle the ex-King Jerome, General Saint Arnaud, and a cavalcade of officers in brilliant uniforms, he rode through the streets. Shouts of “*Vive l'empereur !*” inspired him to make for the Tuileries ; then, realising that the moment was too soon for so significant a step, he rode on, well pleased with his reception, and made his way to the Élysée. There, overcome by his emotions – or, as his enemies allege, fearing the outbreak of armed resistance – he shut himself up alone for several hours.

As the day wore on, efforts were made by the opposition Deputies to organise a counter-attack. Debarred entrance to the Palais Bourbon, they assembled at the *mairie* of the tenth *arrondissement* and solemnly declared Louis Napoleon outlawed and the sovereignty in their hands. But, with their leaders safe in the Mazas prison, they were

like sheep without a shepherd, and were dispersed without difficulty by General Magnan and his soldiers. The rest of the day passed peacefully until the evening, by which time the demagogues had succeeded in rousing some of the mob, and barricades were thrown up in various districts of the capital. The response, however, was nothing like the risings of 1848 ; nevertheless, the situation began to look ugly. On the 3rd and 4th of December, intermittent fighting took place. At one point, during the afternoon of the 4th, the troops undoubtedly got out of hand ; goaded by the taunts and missiles of the mob, they opened fire without orders, and some scores of casualties resulted. This episode has been grandiosely described by the more bitter republican writers, such as Victor Hugo, as " the Massacre of the Boulevards," but the description hardly bears investigation, and the impartial student is forced to admit that no responsibility can be ascribed to the President or even Saint Arnaud. Altogether, the success of the *coup d'état* was achieved with the loss of some five hundred lives, including the casualties amongst the troops. During the height of the rioting Louis Napoleon had created a good impression by driving down the Faubourg Saint-Antoine in his carriage without any escort. The mob, amazed at this display of courage, gave him a friendly reception, some even shouting "*Vive*

l'empereur !" By the evening of the 4th all was quiet again in Paris.

In the provinces, however, outbreaks had occurred in all the big industrial centres of the south and in the republican departments of the south-east and south-west. Many thousands of arrests were made by the prefects, and commissions were despatched to sentence the prisoners. Though many of these sentences were quashed or commuted, thousands of insurgents were condemned to transportation. The severity meted out to the Reds was in striking contrast to the President's leniency towards the political leaders of the Right arrested in Paris. Harsh though it was, it nevertheless compares favourably with the savage treatment accorded by the Second and Third Republics to their opponents in 1848 and 1871. By 1859 all had been pardoned unconditionally. Paléologue records that years later the Empress Eugénie remarked to her husband : "The *coup d'état* torments you like the shirt of Nessus." "I am always thinking about it," replied the Emperor.

A fortnight after the *coup d'état*, Louis Napoleon sought to obtain ratification of his acts by the people. The question submitted to the plebiscite was : "Does the nation wish to maintain Louis Napoleon Bonaparte in authority and to delegate to him the necessary powers to establish

a constitution in accordance with the principles set forth in his proclamation of December the second?" The result of the voting was : Ayes, 7,439,216 ; Noes, 646,737. The figures, of course, do not reflect the true proportion of feeling in the country, for the opposition was largely under lock and key or else in terror of reprisals, but there is no doubt that the vast majority of the nation approved of a step, however unconstitutional it may have been, which promised an era of more stable government than France had known for many years. "France," declared Louis Napoleon, "has realised that I exceeded the bounds of legality only to return to justice."

On the 14th of January, 1852, the new constitution was promulgated. The prince was nominated President for ten years, and upon him was conferred the command of the forces both on sea and land, the power to declare war, make treaties of peace, alliance, and commerce, the choice of Ministers and the right to initiate legislation. To enable him to discharge his functions in appropriate style, he was granted a sum of a million francs a month. The constitution provided for a Senate and a legislative body, but pending the nomination and opening of parliament the President was invested with despotic powers.

This dictatorship lasted until the 29th of March,

1852. During this period the prince succeeded in enhancing his already remarkable popularity, particularly among the working classes, whose condition had certainly never before been the object of so much administrative effort. No sooner was order definitely restored after the *coup d'état* than Louis Napoleon threw himself with unexpected vigour into the task of creating employment and securing the industrial and social welfare of France. He could now proceed unfettered, for funds were plentiful, the entire opposition had been rendered *hors de combat*, and he had received the nation's approval of his programme. Financial reforms were introduced ; taxation was transferred from necessities to luxuries ; the pay of the army was increased ; measures were instituted for the improvement in the housing conditions of the working classes and the sanitation of the towns ; and the President's former plans for the vast extension of railroads, waterways, and docks were now put into operation. Sunday labour was discouraged, and the adulteration of food became the subject of several prohibitory decrees. Public baths and wash-houses were provided, asylums were established for the destitute and mentally deficient, and a system of decent burial provided for paupers. The *Code Napoléon* was revived, and the eagles restored to the army. If the verdict of history

upon Louis Napoleon depended upon his record during the dictatorship alone, it would indeed be a favourable one. Only one stain besmirches this period – his confiscation of the property of the Orléans family, estimated at many millions of francs ; this cost him the support of some of the more moderate leaders, but, since the proceeds of these forfeitures went towards the provision of public baths, asylums, and similar institutions, his prestige was thereby enhanced still further with the lower classes.

He now made no attempt to camouflage the existence of a Court that was imperial in all but name. The State apartments of the Tuileries, the former palace of kings, were thrown open for banquets and receptions. As yet, however, he hesitated to take up official residence there, but lost no opportunity of displaying himself to the people at military reviews, gala nights at the Opéra, the Comédie Française, and other theatres. He made a practice of visiting the poorer quarters of Paris, alone and on foot, and on the boulevards his open carriage soon became a familiar sight to the populace. Never had the people seen a ruler who mixed so freely and democratically amongst them. The effect of his conduct soon became apparent. Delegations waited upon him and petitions were presented, requesting him to restore the Empire. Doubtless most of

these were inspired by his chief adherents, who could not understand his hesitation to assume a title which they had regarded as the objective of the *coup d'état*. But the prince maintained a sphinx-like attitude until the autumn. He was prepared to bide his time until he could be assured that the transition would be effected (at least in appearance) by the will of the people alone. So far, each step in his climb to power had been in conformity with public opinion. He wished to preserve the illusion that, though he might be master, he in fact exercised that mastery only as the servant of the nation.

In September he made a tour of southern France which proved an even more marked personal triumph than that of 1850. Everywhere his arrival was hailed by frenzied hordes, who surrounded his carriage and gave vent to the wildest demonstrations of joy. Roars of “*Vive l'empereur !*” followed him from place to place, and the desire of the populace was so unequivocal that Louis Napoleon was satisfied that the moment had now arrived for the consummation of his ambition. With no little tact, he chose as the occasion for his declaration a banquet organised in his honour by the Chamber of Commerce at Bordeaux on the 9th of October. In this speech he not only dispelled all doubts as to his intentions, but sought to allay the growing agitation in

Europe at the obvious imminence of a return to the imperial *régime*. "I say," he announced, "with a frankness as far from removed from pride as from false modesty, that never has any nation manifested in a more direct, more spontaneous, more unanimous manner its desire to rid itself of all anxiety as to the future by strengthening under one control the government which is sympathetic to it. The reason is that this people now realises both the false hopes which lulled it and the perils which threatened it. It knows that in 1852 society was rushing to its downfall. It is grateful to me for having saved the ship by raising only the flag of France. Disabused of absurd theories, the nation has acquired the conviction that its so-called reformers were but dreamers, for there was always an inconsistency, a disproportion, between their resources and the promised results. To bring about the well-being of the country it is not necessary to apply new methods, but to give it before all else confidence in the present and security as to the future. These are the reasons why France appears anxious to revert to an Empire. There is an apprehension abroad of which I must take note. In a spirit of distrust, certain persons are declaring that the Empire means war. I say the Empire means peace. It means peace because France desires it, and when France is satisfied the world is tranquil.

Glory may well be bequeathed as an inheritance, but not war. Did those princes who were justly proud of being descendants of Louis XIV revive his quarrels? War is not made for pleasure, but by necessity; and in these times of transition when, side by side with so many elements of prosperity, so many causes of death arise on every hand, one may truly say: ‘Woe unto him who first gives the signal in Europe for a collision the consequences of which would be incalculable.’”

This speech evoked the wildest enthusiasm throughout France, and in the chancelleries of Europe it was received with a relief qualified by doubts as to the sincerity of its sentiments. There was now no question as to the turn of events which would follow his re-entry into the capital, but Louis Napoleon managed to curb his impatience sufficiently to continue his tour through Angoulême, Rochefort, Tours, and Amboise, where he seized the opportunity to appeal to the romantic side of public opinion by liberating the Emir Abdul Qadir who had been a prisoner since the days of Louis Philippe. On the 16th of October his return to Paris was signalled by salvos of artillery, the pealing of bells, strains of martial music, and deafening ovations from the dense throng all along the route from the Gare d’Orléans, where he was received by representatives of all the official bodies of the capital.

On his arrival at the Tuileries, addresses were presented, urging the immediate assumption of the imperial dignity. Outside, the crowd surged to and fro, giving vent to ovation after ovation each time the Prince-President appeared. Worn out with gratification and fatigue, Louis Napoleon escaped to seek a brief respite in the palace of Saint-Cloud.

Three weeks later, on the 7th of November, the Senate formally passed a resolution restoring the Empire. One senator alone cast a dissentient vote – and he, one of the prince's oldest and closest friends, his one-time mentor, Vieillard. Fearing that his act might sever their long-standing intimacy, the old man wrote a dignified explanation, declaring that whatever the cost he could not vote against his conscience. The prince's reply was an affectionate invitation to lunch. Despite the popular manifestations, and the vote of the Senate, the prince was not satisfied. He was determined that the nation itself should set the seal of approval on the Empire by plebiscite once more. The result was a foregone conclusion. There voted : Ayes, 7,824,189 ; Noes, 253,145. Most significant of all, however, was the fact that over two million voters abstained. However popular the prince might be, the republican feeling was still strong in the south-eastern departments and the bigger cities.

At eight o'clock in the evening of the 1st of December, the Councillors of State, the Senators, and the Deputies drove to Saint-Cloud with the formal decree naming Louis Napoleon emperor. It was a foggy night, and the procession, which mustered two hundred carriages, was lighted on its way by mounted torch-bearers. The morrow had been selected for the proclamation of the Empire – in deference once again to the superstitious fancies of the prince – because it was the anniversary of his uncle's coronation, of Austerlitz, and of his own successful *coup d'état*. So, on the 2nd of December, 1852, he was escorted by the Councillors, Senators, and Deputies from Saint-Cloud through the gaily beflagged streets of Paris to the Tuileries, where a banquet and reception brought the festivities to a close.

That night the prisoner of Ham slept in the palace of kings : by the grace of God and the expressed will of the people, Napoleon the Third, Emperor of the French.

CHAPTER VI

MARRIAGE

(1853)

Recognition by European powers – the marriage problem –
Eugénie de Montijo – a hurried wedding.

THE first and most urgent object of the newly proclaimed Emperor was to obtain recognition by the European powers. The suspicion that a restoration of the Empire would mean a revival of French militarism and greed for conquest had not been entirely dissipated by the Bordeaux speech. He had then asserted that imperialism meant peace, and he now at once made a gesture to Europe that he intended to translate words into deeds by reducing the effective strength of the French Army by twenty thousand men. This, and further peaceful utterances of the Emperor, together with the tranquillity of the French capital and the complete absence of internal opposition to his assumption of power, combined to neutralise the foreign antagonism which had sprung from the belief that an imperial Government could only maintain prestige in France by pursuing a policy of military glory, and which had been adroitly fanned by the propaganda of exiles

such as Thiers, Guizot, and Ledru-Rollin. An added obstacle to instant recognition was the assumption by the Emperor of the title "the Third," which pre-supposed the reign of a second Napoleon whom Europe had never recognised. However, one by one the powers extended formal recognition to the new *régime*. With that subtle irony which history so often displays, the first foreign Government to recognise the usurper was that of the Bourbon kingdom of Sicily. Of the greater powers, England was the first, Prussia second, Austria next, and Russia last; the Tsar Nicholas hesitating not through any fear of aggression but merely on account of a haughty reluctance to acknowledge a mere *parvenu* as a sovereign of equal rank. Even when finally extending recognition, he refused to address Napoleon in the usual style as "*mon frère*."

Having obtained recognition of his dynasty, the Emperor now turned his attention to securing its future by marriage. Thoughts of marriage had exercised his mind, from varying motives, for many years. Before the Strassburg fiasco he had been betrothed to his cousin Princess Mathilde, and whilst in London after the escape from Ham his engagement had been announced to a Miss Emily Rawles, whose father, however, had promptly vetoed the match on discovering the liaison between the prince and Miss Howard.

Before either of these attachments he had been affianced, or so it was said, to the daughter of Pedro, Emperor of Brazil, and to the Grand Duchess Olga, second daughter of Tsar Nicholas I, in addition to other ventures which might be regarded as the inevitable entanglements of a susceptible young man. During the brief period of the Presidency his marriage schemes had supplanted one another in bewildering succession. A sister of the King of Spain, a Princess of Leuchtenberg, a Princess of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, and a Duchess of Braganza had figured on the long list of those for whose hand he aspired in vain. Now that he was an Emperor, he felt that he might expect to contract an alliance with one of the royal houses of Europe, but to his chagrin all his overtures were severely rebuffed. In three directions he pressed his suit with vigour ; first with Princess Caroline Vasa of Sweden, then with Princess Adelaide of Hohenlohe, a niece of Queen Victoria, and lastly with the daughter of the Duke of Cambridge. In each case he met with a firm, if polite, refusal.

With the fact brought home to him that none of the royal houses would welcome him as a son-in-law, he wisely decided to make a virtue out of necessity and exploit his position as a *parvenu* by contracting a marriage which would flatter the democratic sentiments of his people. He was the

more disinclined to postpone the opportunity of providing himself with a legitimate son by reason of the fact that the lawful heirs to the throne in default of issue of his own – namely, the ex-King Jerome and his son Prince Napoleon – were highly, and deservedly, unpopular. But if the Emperor's decision was wise, the actual choice of a mate was disastrous. The wife he was to marry, though ravishingly beautiful, charming, loyal, and long-suffering, was, by her bigotry and incessant meddling in State affairs, to prove his evil genius, and to make inevitable the collapse of his Empire and his dynasty. Miss Howard, who was established in Paris in a house conveniently accessible from the Tuileries, not unnaturally had visions of a dazzling future as his consort ; but she was doomed to disillusionment, for Napoleon had a very different type of woman in view. His mistress accepted the situation philosophically. "He always was capricious," she remarked, "but he is subject to indigestion and will soon come back to me." She was right.

Napoleon's uncle, Jerome, had once said of him : "He will marry the first woman who will turn his head and refuse him her favours." And the old *roué* was wise in the ways of the sexes, if foolish in all else. Louis Napoleon was enslaved by one of the loveliest sirens the world had ever

seen – a woman who was to do the very thing Jerome had prophesied, inform the would-be lover that the only way to her bedchamber lay through the church. Eugénie de Montijo – or, to give her the full array of titles by which she was proclaimed, Marie Eugénie Ignacia Augustine de Guzman y Porto Carrero et Kirkpatrick de Glosburn, Countess of Mora and of Banos, Marchioness of Moya, of Ardales, and of Osera, Countess of Téba, of Ablitas and of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Viscountess de la Calzada – was eighteen years younger than Napoleon III. Her birth, like that of her future husband, had been premature, taking place in the open during an earthquake. The daughter of one of the few Spanish nobles to espouse the cause of the Napoleonic King Joseph,¹ she had imbibed Bonapartist sympathies in the cradle and had been brought up in a Paris convent as a French girl. For some years now she had been travelling round Europe with her mother, enslaving many hearts with her loveliness, but steadfastly refusing her hand. When the Duke of Alva proposed to her sister, instead of to herself, she had promptly dosed herself with poison which very nearly had fatal results. Her past, in fact, was by no means free

¹ This was the official version concerning her parentage, about which, however, there is considerable doubt. The probability is that her father was the brother of the old Spanish Bonapartist.

from indiscretions. Though far from mercenary, as was demonstrated by her subsequent conduct, Eugénie was supremely ambitious, and there is little doubt that after the *coup d'état* she had earmarked Louis Napoleon as the husband with whose fortunes her own future might most advantageously be linked.

For weeks, onlookers had observed the growing passion of the President for the lovely Spaniard – a passion that was tormented by the girl's caprices and by her letters to him, which were composed by Prosper Mérimée. There is no reason to suppose that the prince himself ever contemplated marriage with her. But her inexorable resistance to his passion only made it the more ardent, so that when as Emperor he found that diplomatic marriages were not readily to be obtained he decided to remove the sole remaining obstacle to his desires. Once this decision was reached, he rushed ahead with almost indecent haste.

On the 22nd of January, 1853, he broke the news of his intended marriage to the Councillors, Senators, and Deputies assembled for that purpose. "The union I am about to make," he said, "is not in accordance with ancient policy ; therein lies its advantage. . . . I have preferred a woman whom I love and respect to a woman unknown to me, with whom an alliance would

have had advantages mixed with sacrifices. In placing independence, the qualities of the heart, and family happiness before dynastic prejudices or the calculations of ambition, I shall not be less strong in that I shall be more free." The public announcement of the betrothal was followed by the suicide in Paris of one of Eugénie's most ardent admirers.

A week later the civil marriage took place at the Tuileries and on the following day, the 30th of January, the religious rites were celebrated in Notre-Dame. The superstitious were swift to interpret as presaging evil for the Empire an incident during the wedding procession, when the gilt imperial crown fell from the roof of the coach in which the Emperor and his bride were seated. For good or ill the bewitching Spaniard was now Empress of the French. She made a favourable first impression on the populace by two unselfish gestures : her husband's wedding-present of 250,000 francs was handed over to the hospitals, and she requested the Council of the Seine to take back their magnificent gift of a diamond necklace and devote its value to the relief of the poor.

With the entrance of a consort into the Tuileries, the Imperial Court was to assume a splendour more glittering than that of any of its European contemporaries, and Paris was shortly to emerge as the queen of cities, the gayest capital in the

world. With highly undignified precipitancy the Bonapartes and all those bearing names which had been illustrious under the First Empire came scrambling over each other to the Court to join in the fight for places, honours, and rewards. For a while the monarchists and the old aristocracy kept aloof, regarding the *parvenu* Emperor and his *entourage* with scorn. Who and what, they sneered, were the men within this upstart's most intimate circle? – Persigny, a mere adventurer! – Walewski, the bastard of the first Napoleon! – Morny, the living proof of the Emperor's own mother's infidelity! And spiteful scandal-mongers exhumed the hoary legend of the Emperor's dubious paternity. But as it became increasingly manifest that the Empire was no mere nine-days-wonder, and that the foreign powers were learning to regard Napoleon with respect and even unwilling admiration, the snobs swallowed their pride and trickled humbly into the Tuileries.

The very reasons which had inspired the contempt of these monarchists prevented republican susceptibilities from being outraged by the existence of this Court – for there were none of the ancient aristocratic privileges attached to it; the scion of a great *seigneurie* had no greater right of entry than the man of humblest birth, if the latter had qualifications of talent or achievement.

With pride the Emperor noted the universal admiration aroused by the radiance of his consort's beauty – then his gaze wandered with newly awakened interest over the charms of the other ladies of the Court.

CHAPTER VII

THE EMPIRE'S EARLY PROMISE

(1853-1856)

National prosperity – rebirth of Paris – life at the Court – *entente* with England – the Crimean War – Napoleon III and Queen Victoria – attempts on his life – the Paris Exhibition – Congress of Paris – birth of the Prince Imperial – Comtesse de Castiglione.

“LOUIS NAPOLEON,” says Erskine May, “was a man of parts ; it is no disparagement to say that he did not attain to the intellectual stature of his great predecessor. It seemed for a time as if he would prove himself a very great man, even as adjudged by high standards.”

In his speech from the throne on the 14th of February, 1853, Napoleon III epitomised in one sentence his theory of government : “To those who may regret that greater liberty has not been vouchsafed, I will reply that liberty has never helped to found a durable political edifice ; it crowns it after it has been consolidated by time.” That was the task which the newly crowned Emperor set himself – to establish law, order, and prosperity by means of a rigid but benevolent despotism, and then, with security thus assured, to release to the people the political and social liberties which, according to his own beliefs,

were their natural heritage. The first half of this programme he achieved with unqualified success.

The public works inaugurated during the dictatorship of the previous year were prosecuted with redoubled vigour, and provided employment for many thousands who had hitherto been starving. Never had work been so plentiful or wages so high. A new era had dawned indeed, and the nation was well content. In the capital the theatres were crowded, the workmen employed in the grandiose rebuilding schemes of Napoleon and Baron Haussmann, Prefect of the Seine, were enabled to spend money freely, and the extravagances of the Court and Society gave a sudden fillip to the clothing, drapery, and catering trades. In Rouen, Marseilles, Lyons, and other important provincial cities similar works were put in hand, four hundred thousand pounds were appropriated for the improvement of the sanitary conditions in manufacturing towns, and it is said that at this period the Emperor never visited any municipality without promoting arrangements for bettering its housing conditions and its sanitation. Railroads and harbours made other hives of industry in which thousands of workers found employment. The result of all this was to provide work for the surplus population of the rural districts who migrated to the towns, whilst for those left on the land conditions were improved

by the reclamation of waste areas, the establishment of agricultural committees, and the inauguration of a credit system for the benefit of the farmers. Corn-production, the grape harvest, and cattle-breeding made rapid increases with beneficent results to the peasantry.

The years which Napoleon had spent in meditation and study in exile, and the privations and vicissitudes which he himself had experienced, had enlightened him, to a degree higher than that possessed by any contemporary ruler or government, as to the needs and cravings of the inarticulate and helpless masses of the people. Humane at heart, and sincerely anxious to improve their lot, he succeeded at first in raising the general standard of existence beyond anything the country had yet known. The tragedy is that the development of failings, physical, mental, and moral, was to wreck all the good that he had done and to render the ultimate state of the country worse even than when its destinies had been entrusted into his hands.

Nothing brings home the vigour and purpose of Napoleon's reforms so strikingly as his drastic surgical operations upon the map of Paris. Mr. W. B. Jerrold's vivid description of this work is well worth extensive quotation: "The horrible maze of loathsome alleys of the Saint Marceau quarter, the ragmen's homes about the Place

Cambrai, the Rue de la Mortellerie where the cholera of 1832 was bred, the lanes of the Butte des Moulins, the sinister Rue de la Vieille-Lanterne, the cut-throat alleys of the Cité, the black and muddy by-ways which lay between the Palais Royal and the Tuileries and the unfinished Louvre ; the tattered sheds and stalls, and showmen's encampments upon the broken ground between the two palaces ; the unkempt and unlighted Champs-Élysées ; the dirt, and confusion, and raggedness of the central markets ; the filthy and dangerous lanes of the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève ; the ugly waste bordered by *guinguettes* about the Arc de Triomphe ; the dusty, neglected Bois, and, at every outskirt, undrained, fever-haunted purlieus, from which the traveller shrank after nightfall – these were the excrescences and the plague-spots through which the Emperor drew his pencil ; tracing in their stead broad and wholesome boulevards and streets, clean flower-bedecked squares, handsome, well-ventilated, and regulated markets, public baths and washhouses, a vast system of underground drainage away from the Seine, a pure and abundant water-supply, *cités ouvrières*, and parks and gardens in every quarter. A spacious highway was cut from the Tuileries to the Place de la Bastille through one of the most tortuous, ill-built and over-populated quarters of Paris. The Louvre was joined to the

Tuileries, and the magnificent Place du Carrousel was levelled and laid out. The great boulevards were completed to the Madeleine. On the heights of Belleville a noble park was laid out for the working population of the east of Paris ; and in the wood of Vincennes, cleansed and pierced with paths and roads, a vast convalescent asylum for Paris workmen was raised. In the west the Champs-Élysées were laid out with shrubs and flowers, and enlivened with fountains ; the Palais de l'Industrie was raised ; the Bois de Boulogne was laid out like a gentleman's park, and brightened by a broad expanse of ornamental water. Through the unhealthy streets of the Quartier Latin boulevards and streets were driven, letting in light and pure air. A stately Palace of Justice rose on the banks of the river. . . . The Malesherbes quarter of Paris, with the Parc Monceau and all that town of palaces around the Arc de Triomphe stands on former waste lands and slums. Around Notre-Dame there are no longer dirty alleys and tumbledown houses. The Hôtel Dieu has ceased to be a shame upon the capital. . . . The Place du Châtelet marks the centre of a quarter of new and handsome theatres." It was in fact the greatest slum-clearance on record. Public utility and hygiene, social advancement, the comfort of the working classes, the pleasures of the rich, the æsthetic gratification of all – every

one of these objects was attained by the revolutionary onslaught upon the map by Napoleon and the enthusiastic Haussmann. It was Prince Albert, consort of Queen Victoria, who later summed up the impression which most onlookers received at that time : " Louis Napoleon," he declared, " wishes for peace, enjoyment, and cheap corn."

The sky seemed in truth without a cloud ; but beyond the horizon the storm was gathering. The alliance of conflicting interests which formed the props of the Empire could not last. Even the inmost councils of the Emperor reflected this fatal fact. " How can you expect my Government to get on ? " was his plaintive query at a later date. " The Empress is a Legitimist. Prince Napoleon is a Republican. Morny is an Orléanist. I am a Socialist. The only real Imperialist among the lot of us is Persigny – and he is mad ! " The Emperor unfortunately had neither the subtlety to reconcile the irreconcilable nor the courage to stake his fortune upon one party and one alone. For a time, however, he cracked the whip and the ill-matched team leant its shoulders more or less willingly to the yoke.

Life at the Court was gilded rather than brilliant. Ceremonial was rigidly adhered to. Though a careful and attentive host, particularly to women, Napoleon III never acquired the art

of playing the graceful and dignified sovereign. He was stiff and *gauche*. He yawned frequently, hated conversation, and seldom smiled, leaving it to the Court Chamberlain to parade through the *salons* crying, "It is the Emperor's wish that you amuse yourselves, *messieurs* !" Yet he would take part with gusto in the masques and costume balls, and romp in the most abandoned manner with the ladies and gentlemen of his intimate circle in the gardens, where games of hide-and-seek and mimic battles were not infrequent amusements. In striking contrast was his domestic life, which was simple, even austere. Invariably an early riser, he shaved himself, ate sparingly, and wrestled with correspondence, audiences, and State affairs all day, except for a short walk before *déjeuner* at half past eleven and his afternoon drive, which enabled him to show himself to the public. For diversion he and the Empress interested themselves in the wave of spiritualism which was invading Europe, *séances* being frequently held at the palace, while Napoleon himself also had his endless procession of amorous intrigues.

Meanwhile international events were fast marching towards a crisis which was to transform the ostracised *parvenu* into the arbiter of the peace of Europe. The comparatively trivial dispute between Turkey and Russia as to the control of

the shrines in the Holy Land had developed into an affair of primary importance. England and Austria, both of whom regarded their interests as threatened, were endeavouring to persuade the obstinate Tsar to abandon his bullying attitude. The astute Persigny saw in this situation an opportunity for Napoleon to throw his weight into the scales and emerge as the preserver of European peace. The French Fleet was accordingly despatched to Greek waters, and, with this hint of force to back his diplomacy, Napoleon ranged himself with England upon the side of the Sultan against the aggressor. His enemies have asserted that Napoleon III deliberately engineered the Crimean War for the sake of prestige and military glory, and that his conduct only confirmed the belief of those who had doubted the sincerity of his assurance that the Empire meant peace. There is no evidence in support of this contention. On the contrary, it would appear that nothing could be further from the truth. The war was not to the apparent advantage of the Emperor ; his hands were fully occupied at home, popular sentiment was against hostilities, and the army was unprepared for a campaign. Moreover, his own conduct belied any bellicose intention, for although the Russians crossed the Pruth in July 1853 the French Emperor continued to make determined efforts for the rest of the year

to settle the dispute by diplomatic means. He suggested convening a European congress, but the Tsar refused. Even when Russia destroyed the Turkish Fleet at Sinope, it was some months before France and England finally declared war in March 1854.

Napoleon threw himself whole-heartedly into the struggle. The greater part of the Allied army which was despatched to the Crimea consisted of French troops, and a huge concentration camp was established at Boulogne for the training and equipment of reinforcements.

The alliance with England presented Napoleon with an opportunity to break down the attitude of semi-ostracism still adopted towards him by the crowned heads of Europe. The Kings of Belgium and Portugal had recently condescended to meet him upon friendly terms, but he had as yet been unable to establish personal relations with the sovereigns of any of the powers. To his invitation to visit the camp of Boulogne, Prince Albert sent an acceptance couched in the most cordial terms. The meeting proved a surprising success, and the Prince Consort extended to the Emperor on behalf of Queen Victoria a wish that he should pay an early visit to England. This took place in April 1855, the Emperor receiving a tumultuous reception in London from the public, who remembered him not only as an ally but also

as one who had passed years of exile in the country. It was noted that, as he drove down King Street, he pointed out to the Empress the house where he had lived in those days, and this frank and unaffected recognition of his past won the warm approbation of the crowd.

The Queen, charmed by his manner and surprised and flattered by his minute knowledge of the details of her career and even of the dresses she had worn on certain important occasions, warmed towards him at once and invested him with the insignia of the Garter. "Is it not extraordinary," she recorded in her diary, "that I, the granddaughter of George the Third, should dance in 'Waterloo Room' with the Emperor Napoleon, nephew of the greatest enemy of my country, to-day my close ally, and who eight years ago lived in this country an unknown exile?" The favourable impression she had formed of him was by no means half-hearted: "That he is a very extraordinary man with great qualities, there can be no doubt – I might almost say a mysterious man," she wrote. "He is evidently possessed of indomitable courage, unflinching firmness of purpose, self-reliance, perseverance, and great secrecy; to this should be added a great reliance on what he calls his star, and a belief in omens and incidents as connected with his future destiny, which is almost romantic;

and at the same time he is endowed with a wonderful self-control, great calmness, even gentleness, and with a power of fascination, the effect of which upon those who become more intimately acquainted with him is most sensibly felt."

Not only did the visit infuse enthusiasm into the hitherto lukewarm alliance between the two countries and their sovereigns ; it also achieved a tangible result, for Queen Victoria succeeded in doing what all Napoleon's Ministers and generals had failed to do — she persuaded him finally to renounce the idea of assuming command in the Crimea in person. This was a project which had been in his mind for some months, fostered by Eugénie, who fancied it would enhance his reputation at home. Disappointed at the failure to break the Russian resistance and concerned at the heavy losses from sickness among his troops, he had persuaded himself that he could do better than his generals and had announced to Palmerston in February his intention of taking over the command. It is true that he had, in fact, evolved a reasonably sound plan of operations for the isolation of Sebastopol, but he had had no experience in the field and had shown no sign of military genius. His obstinacy resisted all efforts at dissuasion until Queen Victoria took the matter up herself. So the Crimean War was left to drag itself wearily to an end without him.

On his return to Paris from England, he experienced the first of his many escapes from assassination. As he rode along the Champs-Élysées on the 29th of April, 1855, an Italian, named Pianori, aimed two shots at him. Happily neither reached its mark, and the Emperor passed on unscathed to the Opéra, where he was accorded a remarkable ovation, an eye-witness recording that many of the audience were weeping. A second equally unsuccessful attempt was made on the 7th of September outside the Opéra by Camille Bellemare, a convicted thief whom the Emperor had pardoned. The coolness of Napoleon on both these occasions was noted and admired.

It was during this year that the Emperor organised the first of the Paris Exhibitions, a somewhat more elaborate and pretentious edition of the Prince Consort's venture in Hyde Park four years before. Twenty thousand exhibitors took part, more than half that number being foreigners. For weeks Paris was inundated with men and women of all nationalities who admired the new avenues, parks, and stately buildings, spent their money freely, and assisted in adding to the gaiety and prosperity of the capital. This auspicious moment was chosen for the return visit of Queen Victoria, who was fêted as no sovereign had been in France for centuries. This

was the first time an English monarch had set foot in Paris since 1422. While driving through the streets, Napoleon indicated in the most natural manner to his royal guest the Conciergerie where he had been imprisoned after his failure at Boulogne. A visit was paid to the tomb of the great Napoleon, and the Queen returned to England a still greater admirer of her country's new ally. "His society is particularly agreeable and pleasant," her diary reveals. "There is something fascinating, melancholy, and engaging, which draws you to him, in spite of any prejudice you may have against him, and certainly without the assistance of any outward advantages of appearance, though I like his face. He undoubtedly has the most extraordinary power of attaching people to him."

The year closed with an even more significant visit – that of King Victor Emmanuel, who now sought to approach the old Carbonaro of 1831 with hopes of armed assistance in the cause of Italian liberation. Louis Napoleon's star was still in the ascendant. The events of the next few months were to make of him, for a while, the cynosure of all eyes.

The new year dawned under favourable auspices. It was, in fact, to prove the *annus mirabilis* of the Empire. The bellicose Tsar Nicholas was dead, Sebastopol had fallen after three hundred

and thirty-two days' siege, and both Russia and Napoleon had intimated their readiness to discuss terms ; only England seemed anxious to continue the war to a more definite conclusion. On the 16th of January, Austria intervened, and a peace conference was summoned to meet in Paris. Thus, not only had the Emperor made France once more a power in the councils of Europe but he had also succeeded in securing that for the first time in her history a Continental congress should be held in her capital and under her ægis. For a Bourbon to have achieved this, would have been a great victory ; for a mere *parvenu*, it was a miracle. The whole attitude of Europe towards him had undergone a revolution. To England he had become the trusted ally ; to Russia, the powerful foe to be propitiated ; to Sardinia, the neighbour to be wooed in the cause of Italian unity ; to Austria and Prussia, still something of an enigma but undoubtedly a person to be treated with the greatest respect. England, Russia, Austria, Turkey, and Sardinia each appointed two plenipotentiaries, who met those appointed by Napoleon in Paris at the beginning of March.

The Emperor had himself been born at the moment when his great namesake was astride his pinnacle of glory. Now, in the hour when his own prestige and power were soaring, his dynasty was consummated with an heir. On the 16th of March,

whilst the Congress was deliberating, a salute of one hundred and one guns announced to the expectant citizens the birth of the Prince Imperial. The baptism was celebrated with great pomp and splendour at Notre-Dame, the Pope officiating by proxy as godfather.

But, astute as Napoleon had so far proved himself, there were others whose cunning could conceive ways of using him as a pawn in their game. Among them was Cavour, the architect of Italian independence. Determined to exploit the Congress for his own ends, Cavour had artfully played a card designed to lure Napoleon into the web and secure him for an ally. The dazzling beauty of Cavour's eighteen-year-old cousin, the Comtesse de Castiglione, would have taken more than a Louis Napoleon to resist. She had been officially presented to the Emperor at a ball given by the Princess Mathilde, and, during the weeks preceding the Congress, Cavour made skilful use of the conquest which the Countess had made. So, during the deliberations of the plenipotentiaries in Paris, the Italian question was mooted and the seeds sown for the ultimate intervention of France.

The decisions of the Congress were in the nature of a personal triumph for the Emperor and his policy. Roumania was granted autonomy ; the Sultan promised liberal reforms in return for a

guarantee of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire; and the Black Sea was neutralised. Peace was signed in April. Throughout the Congress the delegates had been entertained most lavishly by their host. Every evening there had been a State banquet, followed by a ball or some other entertainment. Now that their labours had been consummated, Paris gave herself up to a whirl of banquets, balls, gala performances at the Opéra, fêtes, and military spectacles. Before returning to their own countries all the delegates, including those of the ex-enemy Power, attended a grand review of the troops which had returned from the Crimea. As if to emphasise the altered attitude of Europe towards Napoleon, the remaining months of the year witnessed visits from the future Emperor William of Germany and the brother of the Tsar.

Annus mirabilis indeed ! France had won peace and prosperity, her credit was high, her prestige greater than it had been for decades, her isolation had been exchanged for an alliance with her hereditary foe, her people were contented, all opposition was silent, and now she had an heir to the throne. Napoleon had made her the richest nation in the world, and her capital the envy of Europe. Had Fate decreed his death at this juncture, his name would have gone down to history as that of the greatest benefactor France

had ever known. At the moment, popular enthusiasm attributed to him even those blessings for which he was in no way responsible. The good harvests were laid to his credit, and, even when a reverse occurred in the inundation of the valleys of the Rhône and Loire, his sudden appearance in the stricken areas was greeted with manifestations of the wildest gratitude.

So the year passed. Stag-hunting at Compiègne ; whispering to the voluptuous Castiglione in the moonlit gardens of the Tuileries ; slinking through the postern to snatch an evening with Miss Howard ; sauntering through the wooded glades round Fontainebleau ; playing in turn the libertine and proud husband, the autocrat and genie of the lamp, with kings for pawns, a nation's happiness at stake, and plaudits ringing in his ears – to this phantom Cæsar, life seemed all gossamer in 1856.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HEIGHT OF POWER

(1857-1860)

Estrangement from England – the Orsini outrage – secret interview with Cavour at Plombières – the Italian campaign – Napoleon deserts his ally – cession of Savoy and Nice to France – the Stuttgart parleys – expeditions to Syria and China.

THE diplomatic results of the Congress of Paris had made the military adventure of the Allies in the Crimea appear to be far more successful than was the fact, and, since France had made the greatest contribution, all the glory was focused upon Napoleon. The Kings of Würtemberg and Bavaria, the Grand Duke of Hesse, and the Duke of Cambridge paid visits to the Tuileries ; oriental embassies arrived in Paris, and a definite *entente* with Russia resulted from Morny's mission to the Tsar ; on the French Emperor, indeed, European diplomacy was now centred. The re-orientation of Napoleon's policy as regards Russia and the menacing extension of the naval dockyard defences at Cherbourg had, however, seriously alarmed England, so, on the advice of Persigny, the Emperor arranged to pay a visit to Queen Victoria at Osborne. Though he succeeded in reassuring her as to his pacific

intentions towards England, their relations were not nearly so cordial as they had been during the Crimean War. The tension, however, was somewhat relieved by Napoleon's gesture in offering a free passage through France for all British troops despatched to suppress the Mutiny in India. This visit was followed by an interview with the Tsar at Stuttgart.

Notwithstanding all these diplomatic interludes, the Emperor found time to give attention to internal problems. His speeches from the throne, which he himself prepared with the greatest care, were eagerly awaited and keenly discussed by all classes throughout the country. The Bank of France was reorganised and its capital doubled ; three transatlantic steamship lines were established at a cost of fourteen million francs, and a sum of twelve millions was voted for the further improvement of Paris. The verdict of the nation upon Napoleon's exercise of the power conferred upon him was reflected in the General Election of June 1857, when 5,471,888 votes were cast in favour of the Government candidates as against 571,859 for the opposition. It will be noted that these figures disclose a reduction of two millions in the active supporters of the Empire, but this was probably due to the natural apathy of the electorate on relatively unimportant occasions rather than any growth of opposition to the

imperial *régime*. So far the Emperor's popularity remained unimpaired, and if any reminder of that fact were needed it was provided with dramatic suddenness on the 14th of January, 1858.

It had long been known that on that evening the Emperor and Empress would attend a special charity performance at the Opéra. Whisperings of a plot to assassinate Napoleon as he drove through the streets had reached the ears of the police, who had also been warned by the French Minister in Brussels that an Italian anarchist named Pieri was on his way to Paris. Nevertheless, no serious effort seems to have been made to take adequate precautions or to cancel the imperial arrangements; not even when, at the eleventh hour, Pieri was arrested in the crowd with a bomb, a revolver, and a stiletto in his pocket, did the police make any determined attempt to avert a catastrophe. Napoleon himself had become resigned to the danger of his exalted position; yet, on that very afternoon, when passing the statue of Henry of Navarre, he had remarked to Duke Ernest of Saxe-Coburg: "The only thing I fear is a poniard like that of Ravailiac, who assassinated Henry IV. In any other form of murderous attempt the criminal has hopes of saving his life by flight, and making plans for that in itself paralyses his action."

As the imperial *cortège* swung round towards the

entrance to the Opéra, three deafening explosions rent the air and extinguished every gas-lamp in the street, raining slates, tiles, glass, and fragments of masonry down upon the heads of the dense and panic-stricken crowd that lined the route. In the darkness, pandemonium broke out, the shouts of the infuriated mingling with the groans of the injured and the screams of women and children. Torches were rushed to the scene, and an appalling spectacle was revealed. Fifty-six persons had been wounded – eight of whom subsequently died of their injuries ; horses lay mangled and bleeding in the street ; the pavement was a shambles, and the imperial coach a twisted wreck. A gasp of relief broke from the onlookers as Napoleon and the Empress were seen to disentangle themselves from the *débris*, their only physical injury being a slight scratch on the Emperor's nose. Inside the Opéra the news had spread like wildfire. As the imperial couple, pale but composed, appeared in their box, the audience rose to them with an ovation that lasted several minutes. The police already had Pieri ; they were not long in making three other arrests, including that of the head of the conspiracy, Felice Orsini, a Carbonaro, who had been inspired by genuinely patriotic if misguided motives. Orsini, with two of his confederates, was condemned to death. A letter of explanation which he had written, and which was

published by permission of the Emperor, gained for him considerable public sympathy. Napoleon would have commuted the death sentence to one of imprisonment, had not his Ministers dissuaded him on the grounds that so many innocent victims had been made to suffer.

This tragic episode was the forerunner of dramatic events. The Emperor's enemies alleged that it was the fear of further attempts upon his life by other disappointed Carbonari that impelled Napoleon to take active steps in the cause of Italian liberty. In any case, it was shortly after this incident that he proceeded to translate into deeds the words of encouragement which he had been murmuring for months in the dainty ears of Cavour's emissary, the Comtesse de Castiglione. Through the medium of Dr. Conneau it was arranged that the Emperor and Cavour should meet at Plombières as if by accident. So secretly were the plans laid that even Napoleon's own Foreign Minister, Walewski, was left in ignorance and innocently telegraphed to his master at Plombières the news that the Italian statesman was reported to have arrived there. The interview had far-reaching results. Cavour managed to extract from the Emperor a definite undertaking to support the liberation of northern Italy by force of arms, in return for the cession to France of Nice and Savoy. A further inducement was

held out to the Emperor by the non-committal discussion of a marriage between Prince Napoleon and Princess Charlotte, daughter of King Victor Emmanuel.

Europe, however, had no knowledge of these clandestine arrangements, though uneasiness concerning Napoleon's intentions was growing fast. The first definite indication of the coming storm fell like a bombshell upon the chancelleries when, at the customary diplomatic reception on New Year's Day, 1859, the Emperor astounded the Austrian Ambassador by solemnly remarking : " I regret that our relations with your Government are not so good as they have been ; but I beg you to assure the Emperor that my personal feelings towards him are unchanged." The old bogey of a revival of Napoleonic militarism was resuscitated throughout Europe, but this was soon allayed by the blindness of Austria and the cunning of Cavour, which combined to create a situation where the French Emperor could intervene in the rôle of protector of the oppressed against the aggressor. Austria, having refused arbitration, served an ultimatum upon the Sardinian Government, and the French Ambassador informed the Court of Vienna that any invasion of Piedmont would be regarded as a declaration of war. In defiance of this, Francis Joseph ordered his regiments across the Ticino.

Before leaving for the seat of war to assume personal command of his armies, Napoleon issued a proclamation, declaring : "I desire no conquests, but I resolve firmly to maintain my national and traditional policy. I observe treaties on the condition that no one shall violate them to my disadvantage. I respect the territory and rights of neutral powers ; but I boldly avow my sympathy for a people whose history is mingled with our own and who groan under foreign oppression." The campaign was brief, bloody, and decisive. On the 4th of June, 1859, the Austrians were routed at Magenta. Two days later Napoleon and Victor Emmanuel made a triumphal entry into Milan, and on the 24th the Allies defeated numerically superior forces in the battle round Solferino.

Up to this point Napoleon had gained glory and the gratitude of his ally. Lombardy had been conquered and Milan occupied. He himself had been under fire on the bridge of Buffalora and had displayed some aptitude as a general at Solferino, directing operations from the tower of Castiglione church and grasping at once that the key to the position was the village from which the battle took its name. He had, moreover, derived inspiration from the battle associations of his uncle with this territory, writing his despatches at the desk which the great Napoleon had used,

consulting the map which still showed the disposition of the troops at Marengo, sleeping in houses which had served as the headquarters of his namesake. The war was popular in France, and in the rôle of liberator he did not offend English susceptibilities ; Greville indeed declared : " There is no denying that the Emperor Napoleon has played a magnificent part, and whatever we may think of his conduct and the springs of his actions, he appears before the world as a very great character." He had vowed to free Italy " from the Alps to the Adriatic." For all the above reasons it bewilders the student as much as it staggered and infuriated the Emperor's ally to find him suddenly, on the morrow of his enemy's defeat at Solferino, offering terms to Francis Joseph. Without consulting or even informing Victor Emmanuel, Napoleon despatched an envoy post-haste to the Austrian Emperor at Verona to demand an interview. On the 11th of July they met at Villafranca and rapidly came to terms, whereby Lombardy was annexed to Piedmont but Venetia remained under Austrian sovereignty. By this act, Napoleon transformed the gratitude of the baulked Italians into rage and left Europe equally amazed at the swiftness of his victories and the suddenness of his *volte-face*.

Obscure indeed is the explanation of his conduct. Admirers have claimed that his natural

aversion to human suffering was aroused by the tragic spectacle of the battlefield after Solferino and impelled him to end it upon any terms he could get. To quote Greville's diary again "Lady Cowley told me that he was so tender-hearted that he could not bear the sight of pain, much less being the cause of inflicting it, and she had seen him quite upset after visiting hospitals at the sufferings he had witnessed there, which of course are not to be compared with the horrible scene of a battlefield." Napoleon himself gave as his reasons : the narrow margin by which his victories had been gained ; the formidable fortresses of the Quadrilateral, which his troops would have next been called upon to storm ; the reinforcements which Austria was rushing to the front ; and the desire not to involve himself with Prussia who was mobilising in Austria's favour. The probability is that he had only just realised the extent of the national movement throughout Italy, and recoiled at the eleventh hour from creating something which, like Frankenstein's monster, might turn and rend him. That Napoleon himself recognised that he had not fulfilled his bargain is shown by the fact that on the conclusion of hostilities he made no claim to Nice and Savoy.

The day after his interview with Francis Joseph, he shook the dust of Italy from his feet

and hastened back to Paris, where a month later he held a grand triumphal review of his victorious legions. Seeking temporary repose in more peaceful pursuits, he commenced work upon his life of Julius Cæsar and devoted considerable interest and energy to equipping the Museum of Antiquities in the Castle of Saint-Germain.

But the Italian question was by no means settled. The revolutionaries refused to accept the conditions imposed by the Treaty of Zürich, and the struggle continued. One by one, the Governments of Modena, Parma, the Romagna, and Tuscany collapsed, and these territories were annexed to Piedmont. This time, Napoleon contented himself by preventing Austrian intervention, then claimed from Victor Emmanuel the reward of Nice and Savoy. The annexations by Piedmont and the cessions to France were in conformity with plebiscites in each of the affected areas. Napoleon had thus increased his territory, not by force of arms, but by peaceful cession as a reward for services rendered to a friendly Power and in accordance with the vote of the inhabitants. No one could therefore openly accuse him of an aggressive policy, but the nations of Europe were seriously alarmed, particularly England and Prussia, who feared that his accessions on the south-east would encourage him to seek further annexations on the banks of the Rhine.

For these fears there was little justification. The demand for the nearer slopes of the Alps, in the shape of Savoy, was but the logical compensation for the establishment of a formidable Power upon the farther slopes, and a necessary precaution from the point of view of national defence. At that time there is no doubt that the Emperor had no hostile intentions against Prussia. Nevertheless, he had certainly given cause for suspicion by mooted on various occasions the modification of the treaties of 1815 ; and he now felt that the situation demanded that he should forthwith dispel the doubts of Prussia and her allies. At his suggestion a grand conference took place at Baden in June 1860. Headed by the Prince Regent of Prussia, there gathered to meet Napoleon the Kings of Würtemberg, Bavaria, Saxony, and Hanover, the Grand Dukes of Baden, Hesse-Darmstadt, and Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, and many of the lesser German princelings. The *parvenu* and these men of ancient lineage went into solemn conclave. It was the *parvenu* who emerged with flying colours.

Whilst the Emperor was thus engaged, his troops were employed in two campaigns in the East. In Syria, France had been entrusted by the Great Powers with the task of avenging the massacres of Maronites by the Druses, and in China she had joined with England in the

expedition following the violation of the treaty rights of foreigners and Christians. Under the French flag in Syria the Maronite villages were rebuilt and repopulated and agriculture was revived, whilst at Peking the victorious allies wrung the required concessions from the Son of Heaven. Thus in eight years Napoleon had embarked upon four military adventures. In each instance he had been, not the aggressor, but the champion of the oppressed ; in each case his armies had returned victorious. There seemed no height to which he might not aspire.

CHAPTER IX

TURN OF THE TIDE

(1860-1870)

Commercial treaty with England – offends the clericals and the Pope – the Mexican tragedy – baneful influence of the Empress – decline of prestige – Napoleon's amours – the Universal Exhibition of 1867.

“THE EMPEROR,” recorded Greville in his diary, “must have extraordinary confidence in his personal prestige to defy both the clerical and the protectionist parties at the same time ; it will be interesting to see whether events will justify this audacity.” For the first few years of his reign, Napoleon had endeavoured in his internal policy to be all things to all parties, with the inevitable result of satisfying none. After his return from the Italian campaign, however, he seems to have done everything possible deliberately to provoke political opposition to his *régime* at home. In attempting to give effect to intentions which were unquestionably good, he only succeeded in digging a pit for himself. In August 1859 he had decreed an unconditional amnesty for all political exiles, opening the frontiers to a flood of powerful and remorseless enemies. By the reforms of November 1860, which liberalised parliamentary

procedure and conferred the right of criticism and amendment upon the legislative body without imposing the necessary compensating responsibility, he not only presented his opponents with a fresh means of attack, but also discouraged his supporters. It was quite unnecessary to introduce these reforms, for the nation was well content with the benevolent despotism which had brought it order, peace, and prosperity ; it was, however, in pursuance of the programme of "liberalising" the Empire which he had mapped out at the opening of his reign. In 1860 he also committed the incredible folly to which Greville refers.

At Ham, Louis Napoleon had declared himself a free-trader. In 1856, during the Congress of Paris, he had approached Lord Clarendon on the subject of a reciprocal reduction of tariffs, but had withdrawn his proposals on account of opposition in the Chamber. In 1859 he opened negotiations with Cobden, and on the 23rd of January, 1860, a commercial treaty was concluded between England and France. Both in his views and his actions Napoleon had therefore been quite consistent in this matter. Moreover, by the treaty, he obtained for France valuable concessions in the reduction of English duties on wines, silks, and fashion goods, in return for the opening of French markets to British products,

But France had been traditionally protectionist, and the treaty, which had been negotiated in secret and was not made public until three weeks after signature, provoked a furore of resentment in the manufacturing towns. Thus, whilst pleasing the seaport and vineyard areas, the Emperor made for himself a far greater and more influential host of enemies in industry. The treaty did, however, have the effect of regaining for him much of his popularity with the English people.

More serious still was his mishandling of the Roman question. Italian aspirations had been no more satisfied by the Treaty of Turin than by the Treaty of Zürich, and the eyes of the Resurgentists were now focused greedily upon the States of the Church. To protect the sovereignty of the Pope a French garrison had been left in Rome, but with the rising flames of Italian nationalism the problem waxed ever more perplexing for Napoleon. It became increasingly apparent that he must either defend the Holy See by force of arms or abandon it to its fate by withdrawing his troops. On the one hand, he would be acting contrary to his own long-held beliefs and also antagonising all the friends of liberty in France ; on the other, he would enrage the clerical party, offend his old ally Pius IX, and cause bitter strife between himself and the

Empress. Napoleon was faced with a choice of enemies – the clericals or the liberals. His vacillating policy gained him the enmity of both. Rather than take a bold line which, in either event, must retain for him the support of one or other of the parties, he played the ostrich and buried his head in the sand – or rather in a triumphal progress through the still-enthusiastic districts of southern France, Corsica, and Algeria. During his absence the Italian patriots attacked the Papal forces and captured Umbria and the Marches. Frantic telegrams chased the Emperor in his travels, but distance enabled him to procrastinate. By the time he returned, the position was a *fait accompli*. He had avoided taking sides, but in doing so had angered everybody. Moreover, he had now ranged against him the Catholic States of Europe and had made an implacable enemy of the Pope.

Primarily in the hope of appeasing His Holiness, he now embarked upon the most disastrous and least excusable venture of his reign – the responsibility for which must be ascribed to the Empress Eugénie – which contributed directly and indirectly more than anything else to his enfeeblement and fall. In October 1861, France, Spain, and England formally agreed to land a joint expedition in Mexico with the object of obtaining redress for the violation of the rights of their

nationals and securing payment of interest which had been suspended on Mexican bonds held abroad, the two former powers also intending to enforce the restoration of the confiscated lands of the Church. Within a few months the declared objects of the allies had been achieved, but it then became apparent that France had further designs, and Spain and England promptly withdrew.

Goaded by the Empress, Napoleon had indeed allowed himself to be inveigled into the most fantastic crusade of his career. This was none other than the overthrow of the Mexican Republic and the substitution of a Catholic Empire in Central America. The ardent Romanist Eugénie cracked the whip and her husband meekly obeyed. It was a terrible *volte-face*, for hitherto he had consistently played the rôle of liberator in his foreign policy, whereas now he was to impose upon an unwilling people by force of arms an alien ruler from one of the most reactionary dynasties of Europe. Through the mediation of the Empress he involved himself in the intrigues of ambitious Mexican exiles whose servile flatteries conjured up the vision of himself as the arbiter of their country's destinies. Into the net, as a mere pawn in the game, was dragged the unfortunate Archduke Maximilian, brother of the Emperor Francis Joseph, a man of high principles and courage,

rare devotion to duty, some administrative ability, but little imagination. Duped by the cajoleries of wily adventurers, he was to be thrust on to a throne by foreign bayonets and then abandoned shamefully to his fate.

An early reverse had obliged Napoleon to increase his army of invasion to thirty-five thousand men. At first there was determined resistance by the Mexicans, but, with the capitulation of Puebla, control of the situation was achieved. Under the "protection" of French troops a nondescript assembly of Mexicans declared for an Empire and offered the crown to Maximilian, who landed at Vera Cruz in May 1864. For some time he was maintained in office, if not in power, by Napoleon's soldiers, but, on the termination of the American Civil War, the United States Government, in pursuance of the Monroe doctrine, categorically demanded their withdrawal. Napoleon, eager to grasp any excuse to back out of an undertaking which had proved costly and embarrassing, shamefully deserted the unfortunate Archduke, who was captured and executed by the victorious republicans at Queretaro in June 1867.

If the heart of Napoleon III, like that of Mary of England, had engraven upon it a name, surely that name was "Mexico." The drain of gold and blood had crippled his resources and driven

the sufferers to execrate his name. His sponsorship of Maximilian had outraged the anti-clericals, whilst the final betrayal had infuriated the Catholics. The ambitious policy which the fiasco revealed had alarmed the European Powers, while the preoccupation of the Emperor and the absence of his armies across the Atlantic had prevented him from exerting after Sadowa that dominating influence over Continental diplomacy which had marked the cessation of the Crimean and Italian campaigns. Thus was the way left open for the rise of Prussia under the unscrupulous direction of Bismarck. Worse than any of these results was the effect upon the Empress. She had had her way once. She had tasted power. Now she would continue to wield it, no matter to what end. For some time Napoleon had resisted her persistent claim to be present at meetings of his Council ; now she attended as of right and lost no opportunity to impose her will.

It is difficult to fathom the mentality of one who could so heartlessly, without excuse or even attempt at justification, behave as Napoleon did towards Maximilian. First he had played the tempter – then the betrayer. Perhaps the solution is to be found in the words of his one-time Foreign Minister, Drouyn de Lhuys : “ He is governed neither by passions nor principles. Whereas most men seek to mould circumstances to their own

views, he is content to await events and mould his views and designs to circumstances as they arise." Maybe his mental and moral strength was already being sapped by the progress of the painful disease – a stone in the bladder – which was soon to wreck both will and judgment. Certain it is that he was not the man of the Empire's early days. If proof were needed, it lies in the facility with which Bismarck duped him at the Biarritz interview in 1865, when the Iron Chancellor extracted a promise of France's neutrality during the coming hostilities against Austria, in return for an illusory promise of Luxembourg.

With his popularity at its height, the Emperor had received credit for all blessings, no matter what their cause. So with the tide of his fortunes on the ebb, every mishap was laid at his door. The winter of 1862-3 witnessed great distress in the manufacturing areas of France. This was directly due to the cotton famine resulting from the outbreak of the American Civil War – but it was the Emperor Napoleon whom the victims cursed in their hearts. Again, after the severe winter of 1868, when bread was dear and unemployment rife, the by-elections ran alarmingly against the Government. Yet, despite these whisperings, despite the growing hostility of almost all the political factions, despite temporary

or local instances of distress, France on the whole still remained prosperous and her people contented. The general increase of the nation's wealth had obscured the decline of administrative energy. Napoleon, however, had not become altogether unmindful of the welfare of the people. Upon the workers he had conferred a limited right of combination which enabled them to obtain amelioration of the conditions of labour. The harshness of the military penal code had been abated. The restrictions upon the freedom of the Press and the right of public meeting were relaxed, and after the elections of 1869 further reforms were introduced.

That Napoleon had not altogether lost the art of winning some measure of approval from his critics is illustrated by the verdict passed upon him in 1867 by Émile Ollivier, the liberal leader and former opponent of the Empire : " His mind is not fettered by any mastering prejudices. You may say everything to him, even that which is contrary to his opinion, provided you speak quietly and in personal sympathy with him. His changes, which have looked like dissimulation to many, are the natural movements of an impressionable nature. He forms his resolutions slowly, and he is not displeased when they are forced upon him by the weight of circumstances. If he were left alone, he would adapt himself to liberty."

If he were left alone ! There was the rub. Just as the steady drip of water will pierce the hardest stone in time, so had Eugénie worn down Napoleon's efforts at resistance which had been weakened by his growing ill health. A witness has recorded his impressions of the imperial couple when in the hour of defeat the Empress visited her fallen husband at Wilhelmshöhe. The most noticeable feature was the woman's air of mastery.

Yet it is difficult to withhold sympathy from Eugénie. Thwarted in her domestic relations with the Emperor, she sought solace in political ambition which had for its object the aggrandisement of the Church whose devout servant she was. For to Napoleon she had long since ceased to be anything but an ornament to his Court and the mother of his heir. With marriage, his amours had not ceased, nor even suffered interruption ; rather had they become more frequent. Miss Howard ; Madame de Castiglione ; the mysterious Madame X, wife of a diplomat ; Julie Leboeuf ; Valentine Haussmann, the daughter of the famous Prefect of the Seine ; Marguerite Bellanger ; Caroline Hanaeker, the celebrated singer ; the Duchesse de Cadore, and Madame de la Bedoyère – these were but a few of the names that set the tea-cups of the gossips shaking in the Paris *salons*. If he tired of them all with startling

rapidity, he did at least reward them handsomely ; to Madame de Castiglione alone he gave, amongst many other costly gifts, an emerald, the largest in the world, valued at 100,000 francs, and a pearl necklace which on her death was sold for £17,000.

It is easy to overstress, as has so often been done, the sensual aspect of the Emperor's character. Despite his desperate efforts to derive amusement from such pursuits, he was essentially of a serious turn of mind. No student of his writings could deny this. He not only posed as a patron of Science and the Arts, but was genuinely concerned to promote them. Amongst his most frequent guests at his country château at Compiègne were Pasteur, Sainte-Beuve, Théophile Gautier, Dumas *filz*, and Gustave Doré, Auber, Berlioz, Verdi, and Gounod. Auber conducted the orchestra at the concerts in the Tuileries, and Pasteur frequently gave scientific demonstrations for the benefit of the Emperor.

One bright interlude relieved the gloom created by the Mexican tragedy and the decline of the Emperor's prestige at home and abroad. The Universal Exhibition of 1867 was accompanied by official celebrations surpassing in brilliance anything the Empire had yet seen. Napoleon himself officiated at the opening ceremony, and visits from the Tsar, Bismarck, the Kings of Prussia, Bavaria,

Belgium, and Würtemberg, and the Sultan of Turkey delighted the Parisians, whilst a dazzling succession of banquets, balls, and military reviews revived an illusory impression of prosperity and content.

CHAPTER X

THE " DÉBÂCLE "

(1870-1873)

End of autocracy and the Ministry of Ollivier – the Prussian menace – French unpreparedness for war – sickness of the Emperor – outbreak of hostilities – departure for the front – surrender at Sedan – prisoner of war at Wilhelmshöhe – last days and death at Chislehurst – Napoleon's Will.

By the reforms decreed in 1869, Napoleon III had declared his intention of renouncing autocracy and of relegating himself to the position of a constitutional monarch. It was the " crowning of the edifice " which he had promised in his first speech from the throne as Emperor. Accordingly, on the 2nd of January, 1870, a responsible parliamentary Ministry under Émile Ollivier was appointed and Napoleon relinquished all personal direction of public affairs. Ollivier, on taking office, optimistically informed his sovereign that he could assure him a happy old age and a peaceful succession for his son. Napoleon's passion for appealing to the popular vote for confirmation (or condonation) of his actions was once again appeased by a plebiscite in May, which resulted in seven and a half million votes being cast in favour of the Government against one and

a half million for the opposition. The President of the Corps Législatif, in formally announcing the final figures to the Emperor, solemnly declared : " In supporting the Empire by more than seven millions of suffrages, France says to you, ' Sire, the country is with you ; advance confidently in the path of progress and establish liberty based on respect for the laws and the constitution. France places the cause of liberty under the protection of your dynasty.' "

Certainly no worse moment could have been chosen for the " crowning of the edifice." Had Napoleon conceded parliamentary government ten years before, when at the height of his own prestige, he might have continued by his influence to control the policy of government and yet have been prevented by his Ministers from embarking upon the tragic Mexican adventure ; had he even withheld the reforms now, in 1869, he might still have averted disaster. As it was, he was handing over the reins of power, at a moment when his own prestige was low, to Ministers who were ignorant of, or blind to, three vital factors in the situation – the firm intention of Bismarck to create a war in order to provide the occasion for German unification under Prussia, the pitiful unpreparedness of the French army for a campaign of such a nature, and the extent to which Napoleon's constitution was being undermined

by the internal disease with which he was afflicted.

The whole nation indeed had become so gorged with prosperity that it thought of nothing but the pursuit of wealth and pleasure, and utterly failed to perceive the storm-clouds that were gathering beyond its eastern frontiers. The dream of Bismarck was a German Empire with Prussia at its head ; this had been only partially realised by the formation of the North German Confederation after 1866, for the German territories south of the Main still lay outside the union. The most likely situation to create in these territories a desire to join the Empire would be the necessity for common action in defence of the Rhine. Bismarck determined to engineer this situation by forcing a quarrel with France. Having failed to bring this about over the Luxembourg question, he was now presented with another opportunity in the circumstances arising from the vacancy of the throne of Spain. The candidature of a Hohenzollern prince not unnaturally called forth a vigorous protest from France, who could not tolerate a revival of the Empire of Charles V. The candidature was withdrawn, but the French Ministry, egged on by Eugénie, very foolishly and provocatively demanded a guarantee that it would not be renewed in the future. In an interview with the French Ambassador, Benedetti, at

Ems, the King of Prussia refused to give any such guarantee and telegraphed a report of the interview to Bismarck.

Had the matter rested there, the tension would have ultimately relaxed, but Bismarck's cunning sensed an opportunity to bring about a declaration of war by France. In publishing the King's telegram, he so sub-edited the wording as to convey the impression that France, in the person of her Ambassador, had been ignominiously insulted ; his own memoirs confess that this was done deliberately. The result could not have failed to satisfy the most rabid jingo. France was immediately engulfed in a wave of hysterical war-fever, and cries of "*À Berlin!*" broke out in the streets of Paris.

Whilst this situation had been maturing, the complacency of Ollivier's cabinet had been remarkable. For months Napoleon had been urging the reorganisation and increase of the armed forces of the Empire ; in the previous year he and his War Minister, Marshal Niel, had made similar efforts ; but both the Cabinet and Parliament smiled sceptically at the omens in the sky. Having resigned all autocratic power, Napoleon could not act alone ; and, worn out with disappointment and disease, he gave up the struggle in despair. The extent to which the French Government was deaf to the approaching storm is strikingly

disclosed by the reduction, only a month before the outbreak of war, of the effective strength of the army by ten thousand men, in announcing which Ollivier declared : " The Government has no uneasiness whatsoever ; at no epoch was the peace of Europe more assured."

But Napoleon, at least, had no illusions. From Marshal Niel he had learned long before that the army sorely needed re-equipping, and his doubts had been awakened as to the loyalty of the troops by the fact that in the recent plebiscite no less than fifty thousand votes had been given in the army for the opposition. So, when the question of the declaration of war was being considered by the Council of Ministers, he requested guarantees of success before approving such a drastic step. Was the army prepared for war ? " There is not so much as the button of a gaiter missing ! " proudly retorted Marshal Leboeuf, the incompetent Minister of War. Nevertheless, Napoleon still had his doubts, but he was helpless to resist the public outcry for revenge, the solid determination of his Ministers, and the frenzy of the Empress, who had openly boasted " This is *my* war ! " Realising that if he opposed the will of the Government and the nation his fall was certain, whereas a successful campaign would restore his popularity and save his

tottering dynasty, he associated himself with the policy of his Ministers and prepared himself to play his own part in the drama with as much energy as his failing strength would allow.

Very different was his departure to assume command of his armies at the front from what it had been in the days of the Italian campaign. In 1859, he had received a triumphant send-off; in 1870, he took the circular route around Paris from Saint-Cloud to avoid the crowds. His enemies allege that he was afraid of personal violence, his admirers that he wished to avoid being delayed by the enthusiastic mob. Probably neither of these versions is correct. Whilst it is true that the war fever had caused a violent reaction towards his personal popularity, it is more likely that he was anxious to prevent the populace from realising the precarious state of his health as evidenced by his pale and haggard appearance, which came as a shock to all who saw him on that 28th of July. He was indeed in a critical condition. A month before, a consultation of six eminent doctors at Saint-Cloud had pronounced an immediate operation necessary, but Dr. Nélaton had shrunk from performing the task, owing to the fatal results of a similar operation on Marshal Niel. So seriously did they regard the Emperor's condition, that a surgeon

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accompanied him to the front in his carriage with all the necessary surgical tools and appliances in case immediate action should become imperative.

He was present at the initial skirmish at Saarbrücken with the Prince Imperial—who received his baptism of fire—and it was noticed that he had to be lifted on and off his horse. This petty affray was reported as a victory, and Paris went delirious with joy, but the swift successes and the steady advance of the German legions turned jubilation into panic and sent the Emperor, bowed by despair and wracked with pain, jolting in his carriage aimlessly away from the roar of cannon. Not that he displayed any lack of courage at first, but, disillusioned by the shortage of *matériel* and the rawness and incompetent leadership of his troops, he was irresolute and helpless. One touching incident occurred in the early days of disaster. Changarnier, the soldier whom Napoleon had exiled at the time of the *coup d'état* and ignored in the days of his glory, came to the Emperor in the hour of defeat and magnanimously offered his counsel and loyalty, which were gratefully accepted.

Telegrams from the Empress declared that both Paris and the army had lost confidence in Napoleon, and urged him to relinquish the

command to Bazaine. The Emperor had also lost confidence in himself and, doubtless influenced by Eugénie's plea that in the event of disaster a scapegoat other than himself must be found, he appointed Bazaine commander of the Army of the Rhine. On the 15th of August he withdrew to Gravelotte, where Bazaine found him seated in his carriage, obviously tortured by physical pain. On the following day he arrived at Châlons and there held a council of war with Marshal MacMahon, at which a highly important decision was reached. This decision was none other than to retire, with the whole army, upon Paris, and take up a defensive position slightly in advance of the capital. Had this policy of concentration round the seat of government and the lines of communication been carried out, possibly the whole situation might have been saved by operations similar to those which brought the Allies victory at the Battle of the Marne in the Great War. But imperative telegrams from Eugénie in Paris insisted that neither the Ministers nor the populace would tolerate any such retirement – moreover, declared that the presence of the Emperor in the capital might cause disturbances – and urged that he and his forces should march to join Bazaine. So began the tragic trek which was to end at Sedan. For days the peasantry of eastern France were treated to their first

glimpse of their Emperor ; they saw a pale and haggard figure, bent with pain, crouched in the corner of his carriage and jolting along the dusty roads in the wake of his army, asserting no authority, ignored by the officers and jeered at by the men, gazing with lacklustre eyes into the future and waiting for the end – the pitiful wreck of what had once been Napoleon the Third !

Once again, and only once, was the fallen Cæsar to exert any authority in his native land. With the fall of Marshal MacMahon from wounds, confusion and jealousy broke out among the generals in Sedan. Napoleon ordered the white flag to be hoisted. A violent altercation then broke out among the generals. Some were for surrender, some angrily declaimed against Napoleon, calling him traitor and ridiculing his authority over them or any of their troops. Worn out with pain and despair, shaken by the incessant bursting of the shells and the sight of the sufferings of his soldiers, the Emperor of the French gave his last imperial order. The flag of truce fluttered sadly from the citadel.

Later, on that September afternoon, Comte Reille rode to the King of Prussia, who was surrounded by his staff at Chémery, outside Sedan, dismounted from his horse, then strode towards the little group, a riding-switch in one hand, a

letter in the other. The King tore open the letter, and read : " My dear brother – Not having been able to die in the midst of my troops, it only remains to me to surrender my sword into Your Majesty's hands. I am, Your Majesty's good brother, Napoleon. – Sedan, 1st Sept., 1870."

The Emperor was anxious to deliver himself personally into the hands of the King as early as possible, but Bismarck, fearing that Napoleon might succeed in appealing to the sympathy of the Prussian monarch, was determined that they should not meet until all the terms of capitulation had been settled between the opposing commanders. So, on the morning of the 2nd of September, Bismarck himself interviewed Napoleon in a tiny weaver's cottage on the road to Donchéry. Later in the evening, King William rode over to see his captive at the château of Bellevue. Sir William Fraser tells us that he has the volume of Montaigne's *Essays* which Napoleon was reading when the Prussian arrived. What took place is described by the Prussian Crown Prince (afterwards the Emperor Frederick), who accompanied his sovereign on that occasion : " The King and I dismounted, and were received by General Castelnau, who wore a look of dejection. At the door of the vestibule appeared the Emperor Napoleon in full uniform, wearing the

Star of the Legion of Honour and several minor decorations, and conducted the King into the *salon*. . . . The interview opened by His Majesty saying that fate having proved adverse to Napoleon, and the latter having offered him his sword, he was come to ask the Emperor what his views now were. Napoleon left his prospects for the future entirely to the King, to which the other answered that it was with sincere sympathy he saw his adversary before him in such a position, as he was well aware it had been no light thing for Napoleon to decide for war. Napoleon received the remark with warm satisfaction and declared that it was only in deference to public opinion he had decided to take that step. . . . The King then asked whether Napoleon had any negotiations of any sort in view ; to this the latter said no, adding that as a prisoner he could no longer influence the Government in any way. . . . His Majesty now offered the Emperor the royal castle at Wilhelmshöhe near Cassel as a place of residence, an offer the other immediately accepted. Then the King observed that a guard of honour would accompany him to the frontier to secure his personal safety, and this Napoleon accepted with every sign of special gratification, for evidently he no longer feels safe among his own people. . . . When Napoleon saw me he held out his hand to me ; copious tears were

running down his cheeks, which he kept wiping away with his hand, as he spoke with utmost gratitude, evident both in words and manner, of how the King had just expressed himself. I told him it was only natural in every case to meet the unfortunate in a spirit of compassion ; in answer to my question whether he had been able to get anything of a night's rest, he said that anxiety for his friends amid the miseries of war had allowed him little sleep."

The news reached Paris by means of a telegram from Napoleon to Eugénie. Seldom can such dramatic and far-reaching tidings have been conveyed in so few words. It ran : " The Army of Châlons has surrendered. I am a prisoner. — Napoleon." Wilhelms Höhe, whither he was now conducted, had been the residence of his uncle, Jerome, during that old reprobate's brief and inglorious reign as King of Westphalia. With the Emperor went five generals, two doctors, his secretary, and a small staff of servants. They were well treated, and were provided with good food and wine. As usual, Napoleon managed to collect a library and spent a great deal of his time in reading the bitter attacks upon him which were the chief feature of the Paris newspapers. On the 30th of October the Empress paid him a visit, informing him of her own flight from France and of the generous

offer of a home at Camden House, Chislehurst, which had been made them by one of their English friends.

In March 1871, Napoleon left Wilhelmshöhe and made the journey to Chislehurst. On his arrival in England, he was given a sympathetic ovation by the crowds, with whom his popularity was still great and who lost no opportunity of welcoming his return to exile in their land. A friendly call by Queen Victoria at Camden House assured him of her continued good will. During the twenty-two months which were left to him, he seldom ventured outside the grounds of his new home, but spent his time in walking about the grounds, reading, and working on a new book upon the organisation of the French army. Yet this dying invalid never gave up hope of a return to power. To the very end he firmly believed that his hour would come. He corresponded with the few partisans still left to him in France, and elaborate plans were drawn up ready for his fourth attempt at a *coup d'état*. His chief anxiety was his inability to ride. He had formed the belief that, when the chosen hour arrived, he must make his re-entry into Paris on horseback as a soldier, and this conviction was so clearly shared by his advisers that, when events in the capital had led them to hope that the moment for action was approaching, Rouher actually

crossed the Channel for the express purpose of finding out if the Emperor was in a fit condition to ride a horse !

It was indeed this desire to appear once more in the saddle that first caused him to consult the surgeons again. But the use of the knife had become imperative for far less trivial reasons. At the end of the year 1872 his medical advisers, who had become alarmed at the progress of his malady, unanimously decided that lithotrity was unavoidable, though at the same time they could hold out little hope of a successful recovery. On the 2nd of January, 1873, two operations were performed by Sir Henry Thompson, with apparent success. The condition of the patient fluctuated considerably, but by the evening of the 8th there was so marked an improvement that the doctors decided to operate further the next morning. The Emperor was accordingly given a drug, and at dawn he was to all appearances still sleeping peacefully. But by ten-thirty his pulse was found to have weakened so suddenly that the surgeons became seriously alarmed and at once sent for the Empress. At first the Emperor did not recognise her. Later, however, about eleven-fifteen, although he could not make himself speak, he indicated that he wished to kiss for the last time the woman who, even if her misguided meddling had brought about his downfall, had yet been

his constant and loyal companion in glory and in defeat for exactly twenty years. Then, this tender duty done, he turned wearily to bid a last farewell to one whose unselfish devotion had never wavered throughout the long years that had seen him rise from boyhood to a throne—to Dr. Conneau. Memories of Strassburg and Boulogne, of Ham, of London and the Tuileries, of days of longing and of want, and of a thousand little sacred confidences imposed, must have surged through the brain of the old surgeon and dimmed his eyes as he heard the last faint whisper of his Emperor addressed to him: “*Étiez-vous à Sedan?*” The last curtain had fallen. There was to be no curtain call. Napoleon’s part in the great drama had been played to its bitter end.

After the post-mortem, the body was embalmed and lay in state at Camden House in a *chapelle ardente*, more than thirty thousand persons passing through the room to pay their last respects to the fallen Emperor. On the 15th of January, 1873, the remains of Napoleon III were laid to rest in St. Mary’s Church, Chislehurst, in the presence of an imposing gathering of former imperial dignitaries, foreign diplomats, and the devoted band of exiles who had staked their all with him.

In his Will, in which he bequeathed everything

to Eugénie, he gave the following directions to his son : " Let him never forget the motto of the head of our family, ' Everything for the French people.' Let him fix in his mind the writings of the prisoner of St. Helena ; let him study the Emperor's deeds and correspondence ; finally, let him remember, when circumstances so permit, that the cause of the people is the cause of France. Power is a heavy burden, because one cannot always do all the good one could wish, and because your contemporaries seldom render you justice ; so that, in order to fulfil one's mission, one must have faith in, and consciousness of, one's duty. It is necessary to consider that from Heaven on high those whom you have loved regard and protect you ; it is the soul of my illustrious uncle that has always inspired and sustained me. The like will apply to my son, for he will always be worthy of his name." That son was to fall, six years later, fighting in Zululand for the country of his exile.

To Eugénie, who was destined to outlive her husband by almost half a century, the tragic end of this promising young prince meant not only the loss of a son but also the death of all hope of a return to power. It was the cruellest of all the blows which Fate had dealt her. With stoic resignation she consecrated the remainder of her days to his memory. In 1880 she journeyed to

Zululand to stand upon the very spot where he had been struck down by native assegais, and to bring back his body to England for burial beside his father in the mausoleum she erected at Farnborough. Year after year she revisited Paris to stay at the Continental Hotel in the Rue de Rivoli, whence she could gaze out upon the gardens of the Tuileries in which he had played as a child. But sorrow could not crush her proud spirit. Eugénie never became morbid. In every new invention she displayed the keenest interest, learning to ride a bicycle, buying a car in the early days of motoring, and expressing anxiety to fly at the age of ninety. From 1894 until the outbreak of war in 1914, she spent each winter at the villa which she had purchased at Cap Martin on the Riviera. During the war her Farnborough home was transformed into a hospital for wounded officers. Yet, despite her many interests and the popularity which she enjoyed in her old age both in England and in France, she rigidly abstained from politics. The ambition of the empress had vanished – “The Empress Eugénie died in 1870,” was her reply when asked to give a message to France on the termination of the Great War. But the mother’s memory of her son never faded – “Has *he* a mother?” was her first enquiry on being told of the death of a young Spanish matador. In December 1919 she visited Paris

for the last time on her way to Madrid, where she died suddenly seven months later, after a successful recovery from an operation for cataract at the age of ninety-four.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

THE list of books dealing with the life or reign of Napoleon is legion. Extensive references to him are to be found in the diaries and memoirs of all the leading monarchs, statesmen, and Society leaders of the period ; his life from 1848 to 1870 is the history of France, and is to be found in the works of all the French historians. At the hands of his earlier biographers, Napoleon III has suffered greatly ; as much from the sycophancy of such admirers as W. B. Jerrold as from the distortions of his arch-enemy Victor Hugo. In studying those works, the reader must therefore be on his guard ; as must he also approach the works of the French historians, whose writings are invariably coloured by their own particular political opinions. The following brief list contains a selection of those volumes which deal exclusively with Napoleon's life and reign :

W. Geer : *Napoleon III.*

W. B. Jerrold : *Life of Napoleon III.* 4 volumes.

Archibald Forbes : *The Life of Napoleon III.*

E. B. F. D'Auvergne : *Napoleon III.*

F. A. Simpson : *The Rise of Louis Napoleon ; Louis Napoleon and the Recovery of France.*

Imbert de Saint Arnaud : *Napoleon III and His Court ; Napoleon III at the Height of His Power.*

O. Aubry : *The Phantom Emperor.*

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